

Down to the Devil by **Alice Ariell**

Category: Stranger Things, 2016

Genre: Adventure, Sci-Fi

Language: English

Characters: Eleven/Jane H., J. Hopper, Max M., OC

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2019-06-05 12:01:40

Updated: 2019-07-03 07:44:10

Packaged: 2019-12-12 18:42:57

Rating: T

Chapters: 19

Words: 24,861

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: It's summer in Hawkins, and the kids are alright, but danger still lurks around every shadowy corner. Will the Party survive their summer of love, or will they fall prey to enemies old and new?

1. Of Skate Parks and Shopping Malls

I absolutely love *Stranger Things*, so this is my way to fill the gap between now and the 4th of July. Absolutely no ownership here, just love and awe for these characters and their wacky inter-dimensional demon dilemmas. If you like, please review! All based on trailers and speculation. Without further ado, I hope you enjoy! "Ahoy!"

Chapter 1: Of Skate Parks and Shopping Malls

So many things went missing, and so many have been found. So many things lay waiting beneath the ground. So many things left unfound. I could wake them with a single sound. I might. I may have done. They may have already come.

The first thing El asks Max to teach her is how to skate. Turns out, she's a natural. She takes to the board, rolling down ramps and rails, focused as a laser.

Max is impressed, hooting and riding beside her. Several others in the skate park stop and stare at the duo. Max does a flip before riding down a staircase and El follows right beside her. Their audience follows close behind. They know they should be more low key, but it's hard when you're a baddie.

"Do you want to try something new?" El asks, a sly smile emerging.

Max is gleeful. "Yeah...what do you mean?"

"Come on, we can't do it here," she says secretively, looking over her shoulder at the group still cheering them on. They skate down the street, leaving their audience in the dust.

"What's the craziest trick you've ever wanted to try?"

Max's eyes widen. "I've always wanted to do a wall ride...but I'm not there yet."

"If you want to try, I could help...so you get the hang of it."

"Like, you would protect me? Make sure I don't fall or something?"

"Exactly. And then you could try. Sound good?"

"Yes. But if you do this for me, you have to let me do something for you too."

El nods in approval.

They find a secluded spot behind an old garage with a smooth wall on which to skate.

"So, how/em are we gonna do this?" Max asks, dubious.

"Just focus on doing the trick. I'll help you through it."

Max props up a large slab of wood against the wall to give her height. Then she walks back to where El is standing so she can get some speed going. "Here goes nothing," she says, taking off. She zooms up the wood plank and then seemingly takes flight, skating across the wall with ease, landing like an ace, her arms joyfully flared out. "That was amazing! *You* are amazing."

"That was all you. I was just looking out," she says, but a tiny bit of blood coming from her nose tells a different tale.

"Come on, now it's my turn to look out for you," Max says, hopping back on her board.

"What do you mean?"

"I think it's about time your wardrobe got an upgrade."

"My what?" El asks, but Max is already skating ahead of her. She catches up, and they take off towards the lights in the distance.

They arrive at the Starcourt Mall, a place El can't quite fathom. It's huge—far bigger than the lab was. "All they do is sell things...it doesn't make sense," Elle mutters, as she and Max step inside.

"I know consumerism is supposed to be bad and everything," Max admits, "but sometimes you just need a little self care, you know?"

El shakes her head. She does *not* know—but she's about to learn. She marvels at all of the lights, fountains, colors, people happily walking about. She feels joy around her in waves as everyone discovers their new favorite spots. The mall has only been open a week or so, and energy is high.

Max leads her into a large clothing store called *Merry Go Round*. El is instantly drawn to all of the bright, colorful patterns. She touches the soft fabric, and feels suddenly horrified by the faded blue flannel shirt she is wearing. "Let's try on a few things!" Max encourages, grabbing hangers by the fistful. El is shocked to see this blatant disregard for common sense, and decides to join in, grabbing as many colorful pieces as her heart desires.

The first thing she tries on is a polka dot red sundress. She smooths her hair in the mirror and fluffs her skirt...she thought she would never be the kind of girl who looked like this... so *pretty*.

A knock on the dressing room door. "Can I see?" Max asks, clearly excited to show her what she is wearing as well. El opens the door, and Max's jaw drops. "Oh my god, yes! I love this! How do you like these?" she asks, modeling a pair of light wash jean shorts and a yellow t-shirt.

"So cute," El agrees, blushing.

"I can't wait to see everything else!"

They both end up spending all of the allowance they've saved for months, but it's worth it. El feels more like herself today than she ever has. No one is telling her where to go, what to wear, or who to be. It's an exhilarating feeling—to be free.

Before heading home, they stop at *Scoop's Ahoy* for some ice cream.

A teenage boy has his back to the counter, drizzling sprinkles. "Steve?" Max asks, aghast at seeing him in this silly sailor uniform.

Embarrassed, he turns around slowly, but when he sees it's just Max and El, he relaxes. "Well hello, ladies."

"Don't you mean 'Ahoy'?" Max asks, poking fun.

He shrugs, raising an eyebrow. "What can I get you landlubbers?"

"I'll have pistachio in a cone, *sailor*," El says in good humor, feeling sorry for him.

"Chocolate for me," Max orders.

They giggle at him as he prepares the dessert. "Sprinkles?"

"And whipped cream," El adds.

"And cherries as well."

As he's handing over the cones, he adds, "Hey, umm, how're things with your brother? He hasn't been bothering you, has he?"

"Not since we showed him who's boss," she says. "Thanks for asking." Now she feels kind of bad for bossing him around...but not really. It's too much fun.

"Hey, yeah. You kind of saved my life so...I've got your back."

"Me too."

A teenage girl about as tall as Steve steps out from behind the counter. Her name tag reads Robin. "More friends of yours?" she asks dryly as the girls walk away.

Enjoying their ice cream, they continue to walk around, window shopping and gossiping. "It's not that I'm not still into Lucas. *I am*. It's just...he's always staring at me with these *googly* eyes, and it's just a bit overwhelming sometimes. I mean, how often can two people kiss each other before it becomes redundant?"

El shrugs. "I don't know. I could kiss Mike all day. And the day after, and after that..."

Max laughs, holding her hands up. "Yeah, I get it. But you guys are *different*. You have the star crossed lover thing going for you."

"What does *that* mean?" El crinkles her nose.

"You were separated for a *year*. All either of you wanted to do was see each other again, so now that you can, it's like—*electric*. I'm telling you, it's the stuff of romance novels."

"Like those old movies?" El asks, thinking of the days she spent trapped in the cabin, watching old romance films.

"Yeah. Whereas Lucas and I are..."

Max is still talking, but Elle can no longer hear her. Her senses spike and her eyes widen as she watches a janitor pass by them—a janitor who looks oddly familiar. Her mind flashes back to being dragged towards the soundproof room by orderlies...she would cry out, beg and plead for them to let her go—and then it hits her. He was there, in the lab, a long stun baton hanging from his hip. He wheels the garbage passed her, and she whirls around to watch him walking away.

"What's wrong?" Max asks, putting a hand on her shoulder.

El's heart is pounding, and it takes everything in her not to shatter all of the glass surrounding them in a fit of rage. She looks around her for other enemies, which is when she notices all of the cameras—like the one that was mounted in her room in the lab—one on every corner, several aimed at her right now...She looks back towards the janitor, but finds that he is gone.

"Hey, are you okay?"

El shakes her head. "We should go."

Tell me what's wrong."

"That janitor...I think he worked at the lab."

"What? Well, they closed it down right? Maybe this is the only job he could get," she suggests, trying to make sense of this.

El nods, still feeling nervous and exposed. "Still, let's get out of here. I have the creeps."

Max nods in agreement, unsure how she should feel about El's sudden

change in mood. Had she actually seen someone from her past, or was she so used to suffering that she just couldn't have a good time? Her biological dad was a therapist in LA, and he would talk about people with post traumatic stress a lot. Maybe El just needed more time to adjust. Or maybe the cameras recorded their every move inside the mall. Maybe the janitor took the garbage outside. Or maybe the garbage was a decoy that he left in the hallway before entering a code in a secret elevator, taking him *down, down, to the devil*.

2. A New Hope

Chapter Two: A New Hope

Mike tries to do something with his hair in the bathroom mirror, but gives up quickly. He's excited to have El over tonight, but also pretty nervous. It's the first time she's been back in his home since they ran from the 'bad men' two years ago. He knew he had nothing to really fear. Hopper had thoroughly searched the house, removing all listening devices months ago—it had been part of the deal he made with Doc Owens. No surveillance of any kind. If Brenner was still alive, he would have never bought it, but since the bastard was long gone, he trusted what the doc said—not to mention the fact that Hawkins lab had been properly shut down for about a year now. All was well.

Karen, Mike's mom, had been apprehensive to have El over, still traumatized by her own encounter with the government agents, particularly Brenner. She was afraid that he was still out there somewhere, even though Mike and Hopper had assured her otherwise. She didn't like to imagine the alternative. She opens the front door slowly, and is surprised to see a lovely young girl with wavy, shoulder length hair. She looks nothing like that old black and white photograph when her head was shaved. She looks so... normal... "Nice to meet you."

"You too, Mrs. Wheeler. Thank you for having me over." The normalcy of this moment is everything she has been dreaming of. She steps inside the house, grinning as Mike walks down the stairs to greet her.

"Hey, El," he calls, meeting her at the door. "You look great." He notices her new outfit, nodding in approval. They stand there, staring at each other, as though waiting to embrace.

Karen clears her throat. "Well, I'll just be finishing up in the kitchen," she says, strutting away, glad that Mike has a girlfriend, and yet still anxious that it's her.

"Come on, we have the basement to ourselves," he says, taking her

hand.

He puts on Star Wars: A New Hope, before turning off all the lights and cuddling close to El on the couch. Snuggling in the dark, El leans against Mike's shoulder. She enjoyed her long day with Max, despite the weird run in with that 'janitor', but now she feels relaxed. She decides to distract herself with the film. Darth Vader slides his light saber through Obi-Wan Kenobi. She gasps, clinging to Mike. Why does Luke have to lose him too?

"It's just a movie," Mike reassures her, surprised she would react this way. She was always surprising him. "I've got you."

She looks into his eyes and is calm again. Why can't life always be this easy?

"Did something happen? You've been really quiet tonight," he says, concerned.

"No. It's just...a really good movie." She pauses, noticing his grin, and her entire demeanor shifts. "Why are you smiling?"

"I'm just happy."

"Me too." She pulls him into a kiss.

"Michael!" his mother calls from above. "Dinner!"

Their lips meet again and then they go off together, up the stairs, still wrapped in the concept of love without the need to say it out loud. It's written in them.

#

Later that night, she dreams that they are sailing in a rowboat in the middle of the ocean. They are completely alone in the twilight darkness. The endless blue glitter and glow transfix her. The rowboat rocks beneath them. Perhaps a passing dolphin? She looks over the rim of the boat, into the deep. From the depths creep a kind of smoke, slithering to the surface. It latches onto her wrist, trying to pull her in. She fights against it, and another arm of smoke bursts from the water, wrapping itself around Mike's throat. It pulls them

under, cracking their little boat in two.

3. Something is Rotten in Denmark

Chapter 3: Something is Rotten in Denmark

The next morning, El decides to cook up a Spanish omelette. She is trying to help Hopper improve his eating habits, and yes, her own as well. Eggos are a nice novelty, but once she started reading cookbooks in the library, a world of invention and delight opened up to her.

"I won't be home till late," she says quickly, serving him the steaming plate of eggs.

"Is *that* why you cooked breakfast? Trying to butter me up, literally?" He says this in his usual deadpan tone, biting into the toast.

She laughs. "No." She thinks for a second. "Maybe. Does it matter?"

"What's going on tonight?"

"I'm working on some songs with Max and Lucas. We can use his garage so..."

"First you pick up skating, and now you're in a garage band?"

She nods, excited. She enjoys singing and writing lyrics, and the idea of performance is kind of thrilling. She spent her childhood in silence and isolation. She wants to know what it's like on the other side. As long as Papa is gone, what can it hurt?

He exhales. "When are you gonna start asking to go on tour, huh?"

"What? No, we're not even a real band yet," she says lightly.

"Yet? *Mhm*. This is how it starts."

"We're just having fun."

He raises his eyebrows dramatically. "When can I hear this 'fun' music?"

"So can I go?"

"Yeah, of course you can." He puts his fork down. "You know, I'm really proud of you, kid. You're coming into your own. Finding what fits. It's...I wish Sara could have met you. She would have loved you." A tries to choke back the tears, but they fall independently from his eyes.

"I'm sure I would have loved her too," she says quietly, reaching out to hold his hand. "She was lucky to have you when she was little." She tries not to envy the childhood she could have had if she were really his daughter. If she weren't trapped in the lab all those years, held under the sway of a narcissist who only cared about what she could do for him. Now she's crying too.

"It's okay, kid. As long as we have each other, it's gonna be okay."

#

Mike was right. Even though he warned her that most kids hate school, she can't help but love it. Her favorite class is English with Ms. Sabrina. Today they're reading Shakespearean sonnets, and soon they'll start reading Hamlet. El had already read the play over the summer, eager to decode the old English. The idea of a young Prince plotting his revenge against his uncle, the evil king, was very appealing to her. She would even read his lines out loud to herself, imaging that she was him. She envied his resolve and even his madness. She thought it must feel good to just let go like that. She imagined that's how Kali must feel. Kali...if she had escaped the police that night...and if she hadn't...El didn't want to think about that possibility.

"Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks, but bears it out even to the edge of doom," Ms. Sabrina recites, keeping El on the edge of her seat.

She steals a glance at Mike, who looks deathly bored, but when he catches her staring, perks up.

"If this be error and upon me prov'd, I never writ, nor no man ever lov'd." Ms. Sabrina puts the poem down. "You see, boys and girls,

Shakespeare is declaring that true love conquers all. I hope one day you are all lucky enough to experience that kind of feeling first hand.

"Maybe it's not for losers," Stacy says under her breath, looking at Dustin. Her friends laugh with her.

El raises her eyebrow at this snide remark.

"Excuse me, Ms. West, that is very rude. Apologize. Now," Ms. Sabrina demands.

"No way. I was just stating a fact."

The bell rings, and Max stands up to say something to her, but when Stacy stands and moves to leave, she trips over her own shoelaces. Somehow they've been tied together...Max's eyes widen and she looks at El, who doesn't even turn around to watch Stacy fall. She leaves class with her arm around Dustin.

"What the hell!" Stacey complains, wildly tugging at her shoe laces.

Ms. Sabrina moves to help her as Mike, Lucas and Max share meaningful looks and leave with everyone else.

#

The garage is dimly lit as El strums the guitar and starts to sing.

"Close your eyes, my love,
and know I'm with you,
in disguise, the painful stillness.
It's the antidote, to kill the numbness,
it's the suffering that keeps us going
in the longest nights of our becoming.

Just look for me in every star you see,
I'll come back for you, baby.

Just look for me in every star you see,
I'll come back for you, baby.

Hold my hand, my love,

I feel your presence,
intangible, an empty illness.
The poisonous touch,
the salt in the wound,
the dark side of the moon.

"Just look for me in every star you see,
I'll come back for you, baby."

"That was beautiful, El," Max says, going in for a hug.

"I wrote it when I was in the cabin." She puts the guitar down. "I don't know if Mike will like it. It's so sad."

"Some of the best music is," Lucas tells her. "That's why they call it the Blues."

"What's that?"

"You're kidding, right?"

Lucas leads them into the living room to show off his parent's record collection. They spend the next few hours around the record player, listening to B.B. King and Etta James.

"You know, there's going to be a talent show at school in a few weeks. Sign up is still open," Lucas remarks. "I could back you up on the guitar, and Max could harmonize with you."

"I could?" Max asks, raising her eyebrows to the sky.

"I've never known you to be shy," he teases.

El is interested but apprehensive. "I don't know. I probably shouldn't attract attention."

"Why not? The lab is gone, Hopper adopted you, you're coming to school...why not stand up and be who you are? You're talented. It would be a pity to let that go to waste—and we could have a lot of fun doing it."

"Look at you and your sage wisdom," Max compliments, kissing him.

"I'll think about it."

"Ms. Sabrina is helping to run the show. You should talk to her about it."

Hopper picks her up at nine, as promised. "So, are you starting a new rock revolution?"

"Actually, it's more of a blues vibe."

Hop lets out a long whistle. "Well, I'll be damned."

El closes her eyes and leans her head against the window.

Neither of them notice the sleek black BMW trailing a few cars behind.

4. She loves me, she loves me not

Chapter 4: She loves me, She loves me not

The next Morning, over eggos, because every morning is not so fancy, El asks, "When are you going to ask Joyce to dinner?"

"What?" he asks, squeezing too much lemon into his water. "Where'd you get *that* idea?"

"Oh, I don't know. Maybe I read it off your every interaction with her. Or maybe it's because I'm *psychic*. Either way. You should ask her out tonight. It's a full moon. *very* romantic."

He shrugs, as if he also had this idea recently. "Maybe I will."

"Good. I'll be out again, practicing."

"You're gonna have dinner over there?"

"Actually, Max is taking me to this little cafe bookshop in town."

"You and Max are getting pretty close, huh?"

"The guys are my best friends, but, I can really be myself with Max. She just gets me on a different level. It's like having...a sister."

"Have any sisters in the lab?" he asks, and then instantly wishes that he hadn't. Her face has gone pale. "I'm sorry. You don't have to talk answer that."

"No, I should tell you." She swallows a lump in her throat. "When we still lived in the cabin, and you were gone, I went to find my mother."

"I know. You told me. You didn't say much about it though."

"That's because I didn't really find her."

"I saw how she is. I'm sorry."

"She showed me what happened to her."

"What?"

"She showed me. I saw it all in flashes. And I saw myself. I saw a little girl with me. Kali. She was older. He stopped letting me play with her and the others when I was six. When I started learning how to really make Papa happy." Just hearing her say it makes Hopper nauseous. "It started with just guessing what symbol was drawn on a card. When I got really good at it, he would make the tests more difficult, until that's all I did. I don't remember seeing her for years. I went to find her after I realized I couldn't trust Aunt Becky. Kali had escaped somehow and was living on the street, in a warehouse, with weird people. It wasn't any kind of life. All she thought of was revenge."

"Is she the one that put you in that punk rock getup?"

"I helped her find someone. She wanted to kill him for what he did. He was the one who hurt my mom. I wanted to hurt him. I did hurt him. But she wanted me to kill him, and I couldn't do that."

"Of course you couldn't. You're a good person. It's okay. You don't have to be ashamed of that. I don't blame you for what you did."

"I'm not ashamed of that...but I didn't tell you...he said that Papa is alive. What if he's still out there?"

This is a growing fear that Hopper shares. It was almost too easy for Owens to hand over the forged adoption papers. Like they wanted this to happen. One of the stipulations of their deal was that Hopper and El remain living in his residence. They are forbidden to leave town. But she doesn't know that. He doesn't want his paranoia to infect her. "If he is, there's nothing he can do to you now. You're too strong. You proved that. He can't control you anymore. But you know what, I like to think he's dead. He might as well be."

"Are you hiding something from me?" El asks, focusing her gaze on him.

"What? No. Jesus."

"Please don't lie to me."

"I'm not."

El's eyes widen in anger, and she inadvertently turns on all four burners on the stove.

"We do not light fires in this house!" he is raging now as well.

She closes her eyes and the flames go out. "I'm sorry. I trust you. I'm just freaked out. I have this horrible feeling that something is coming. Something I can't see."

"You know what I see?"

"What?"

"I see a girl whose about to be late to school."

"Wow, not what I expected you to say..."

"You can worry about a million things until you go crazy, or you can focus on the present moment and enjoy the day. Keep your eyes sharp, but don't forget to see what's in front of you. You've got people surrounding you who care about you."

#

When she leaves for school, Hopper can breathe again. He looks around the kitchen, that itching feeling of being listened to crawling up his spine. Standing on his chair, he uncorks the light fixture over the table, looking for a listening device. He doesn't find anything there, but that would have been too easy. He goes to the phone and dials the person he's been avoiding for months.

"Listen, doc, I need you to be straight with me."

"Haven't I always been?" Owens replies smoothly on the other end of the line.

"The adoption. It was so she'd stay put, wasn't it?"

"What are you talking about? It's what you asked for."

"And if I look around my house, or Joyce's, they wouldn't be bugged, would they?"

"This is ridiculous. What do you want me to say? We are letting her live her life."

"You haven't denied either question. You're very good at that. The 'nice guy' routine."

"Why don't you relax and forget about this, okay? Take your own advice. You'll both be a lot happier."

"What did you just say to me?" he asks in a deadly tone, but halfway through, Owens hangs up.

5. Red Sparrow

I am introducing an original character in Ms. Sabrina Smith because I thought it would be wicked fun to drop her into the mix and add a slightly different vibe to my alternate season 3 universe. Let me know what you think in the comments below and don't forget to favorite so you can stay updated! Thank you so much for reading!

Chapter Five: Red Sparrow

Sabrina Smith sits in the café sipping her black tea, reading a book of German poetry. She observes people from the corners of her eyes as they obtusely gawk and whisper. And why not? A new teacher is about as exciting as a rocket ship for a small town like this. Let them watch and wonder. She smooths her long brown hair and turns the page.

A middle aged man with a receding hairline in a blue suit is sitting two little round tables away. He came in after her, ordered a coffee, and has been sitting there, reading the paper for as long as she has been reading her book. He makes no move to leave or get a refill. He just glances at the paper and every other minute shoots a piercing look her way.

She closes her book, places it flat on the table, and stands, taking the seat across from him. "Hi. I couldn't help but notice you looking at me. Have we met before?"

"No. I don't think so." He clears his throat, clearly surprised and irritated by the confrontation. "Aren't you that new teacher at Hawkins Middle?"

"I am. Does your child go to school there?"

"Yes, Jim, but he doesn't have you. He just mentioned you in passing, and I wondered...sorry about the staring. We don't get many new people around here."

She smiles warmly. "I get it." She extends her hand. "I'm Sabrina."

"Michael," he replies, giving her hand a firm shake. He's surprised by the strength of her grip. "Where are you from, exactly? I can't place your accent."

"New York. What about you? You don't really seem like the small town type."

"How do you mean?"

"Just a hunch."

"I'm from Wa—well, umm Wisconsin, originally."

"Mhm. What brings you to Hawkins?"

"Work. I sell life insurance." His gaze is flat. Impenetrable.

"Really?" she asks, raising her eyebrows. "That's always good to have." She waits for him to give her his pitch, but he doesn't.

"So what brings *you* here?" he asks. "Hawkins is no New York."

"I'm writing a book, and I thought a small town would be the perfect place to finish. There's nothing like the hustle of a city to distract you from your work."

"Wow, a book, huh? What's it about?"

"If I told you, I'd have to kill you," she says lightly, with a smile. His face goes pale. She reaches out and grabs his hand with a chuckle. "I'm only kidding, Mike! It's...science fiction, I suppose."

"Like Star Wars?"

"Sure. Anyway, do you have any recommendations for things to do around here?"

"Well, the Starcourt Mall just opened last week."

"The mall...interesting." Through the window, she sees Jane and Max walking by. "Okay. Well, thank you, Mike. It was a pleasure meeting you. I hope to run into you again soon." She stands, retrieves her

book of poetry, and walks out of the café.

Agent Michael Baldwin turns beat red. Why did he feel like that pretty little school teacher just interrogated him? She was clearly hiding something, yet seemed so cavalier...like she *knew* who he was and what he was doing...

Walking down the quiet downtown street, Sabrina waves to El and Max, who are heading to the café.

"Hi, Ms. S!" Max calls to her.

"Hello, ladies! So good to see you outside on such a beautiful day." El looks like she wants to ask something, but is hesitant. "Is everything alright?"

"I was wondering about the talent show. I wanted to ask in class, but..." Jane blushes.

"Oh! Sign up is open until tomorrow."

"Really?" Max asks, excited.

"Are you two planning on doing something together?" she asked, pleased.

"We're kind of starting a band." Now both girls are blushing.

"Fantastic! I'd be happy to assist with anything you need."

Down the street, a car comes careening down the lane. Billy is out on another one of his speeding rampages. This time, he wants to really put the fear of death in Max. He hits several potted plants lining the sidewalk, getting far too close to Sabrina and the girls. Then, suddenly, his car comes to a crashing halt, but he hasn't hit anything. His foot is still pressed on the gas, and the engine revs angrily, but it's as though he's stuck behind an invisible glass wall.

"Did you...?" Max whispers, but El shakes her head. They stare in shock as Ms. S squeezes her fist and the engine dies.

"Shit!" Billy shouts from inside the car, slamming his palms on the

wheel over and over.

"You really need to watch where you're going," Sabrina tells him through the glass. Then, turning back to the girls she asks, "Have you ladies been to the rose garden? It's so beautiful."

Amazed, they follow her like ducklings towards the park. As they walk away, Billy's car turns back on, the radio blasting Tears for Fears "Everybody wants to rule the world."

Agent Baldwin stares in amazement from inside the café as the three of them walk away. Did his eyes deceive him or did the woman turn around and wink at him before they disappeared?

6. In the Garden

Chapter 6: In the Garden

The girls sit on the bench in the center of the garden as Ms. Smith gently brushes her fingertips on scaled leaves.

"Ms. Smith, we saw what you did. Thank you," El says, holding her gaze. *Who are you?*

"I know you must be wondering about that. I have to ask you not to. The less you know the safer you'll be."

"Are you from the lab?" El asks, standing, unable to hold back.

Sabrina lowers her eyes. "I know that *you* are."

El is frozen in place. "How?" She had been so careful lately, hardly using her powers at all.

"A day will come soon when you have your answers. I promise you."

El shakes her head, almost sneering. She must work for the lab. She must be an enemy.

"I wish you could believe me, and I know you can't if I'm not honest...but I can't put you in more danger than you already are."

"I'm not afraid of danger."

"I wish I was as brave." She pulls off her necklace, a thin gold chain, and holds the clear crystal at the end between her fingers. "I want you to have this." She hands El the necklace. Then she pulls off an opal ring, handing it to Max.

"I can't accept that," Max says, confused.

"Please," she says gently, pressing the ring into her palm.

"Why are you giving us your things?" El asks, almost irritated. Her trust could not be bought.

Then, from her pocket, she pulls out a silver key. "When the sky is black and red, and there is no morning, go find the little yellow house on East End. In the attic, there is a door..." footsteps around the hedges...a shadow falls into the circle. "And that girls, is a metaphor," she says in the tone of their teacher, as if completing some kind of lesson in language.

They all turn to see who has invaded their circle.

"What the hell did you do to my car, freak?" Billy asks El, already accustomed to bizarre things happening around her. He doesn't know why, but he's ready to find out.

"I think that you should watch your tone, Mr. Mayfield. I wouldn't want to call social services on you. I don't think your parents would enjoy being questioned, do you?"

"Huh?" he asks, his tone suddenly innocent. "Oh, umm, yeah. I'm sorry about coming so close to ya. I lost control of the wheel I guess. You saw how weird my car was being."

"And you're blaming this girl, who was on the sidewalk with me?" she asks slowly, as though speaking to an idiot.

"No," he says, flashing his winning smile, but a tremor runs through his lower lip. What the hell was going on here? Maybe he should stop taking steroids for a day or so...the world wasn't making sense. "Sorry, uh, Max, do you need a ride home?"

"No," she replies sternly, rolling her eyes.

"Okay, I'll see you later then." He scurries out of the garden like a rat would a cage.

"What do you mean about the house?" El asks, but when she turns around, Ms. Smith is gone. El stares at the key in the palm of her hand as though it were on fire.

Later:

"Sir, the information you've requested," an agent announces, handing over the manilla envelope to his boss.

The man sitting behind the desk pulls out black and white photographs and a stack of files underneath. He examines the images first. Sabrina Smith walking down the steps of the school entrance, grocery shopping, sitting in the café, talking to Eleven and her friend in the park...He shuffles through the pages beneath. "Why is there so little intel?"

"Her resumé indicates that she lived and worked in New York, but no record can be found of a twenty-five year old Sabrina Smith in the New York State area. We dug a little deeper and discovered that all of the numbers on her reference list are out of service. We called the school she listed in her employment history, and they'd recently lost a Sabrina Smith, but not because she moved—she retired at 75."

A knock on the office door.

"Come in."

Agent Baldwin enters, nodding in respect at his boss and fellow agent. "Sir...I know you requested that I only observe the subject, but I was made."

"What happened?"

"She introduced herself and we spoke briefly."

"Did you notice anything out of the ordinary about her?"

"It was like she knew who I was and what I was doing, sir. She was baiting me, and seemed to enjoy it."

He nods, taking this all in. "Were you able to acquire what I requested?"

Agent Baldwin opens his briefcase, retrieving a small white teacup impressed with the red stain of lipstick encased in a plastic bag.

"Sir, there's something else you should know. She seems to be very friendly with Subject Eleven. The girl used her powers in front of her, to stop a speeding car from crashing. At least that's what I think happened. It could have been the woman. I couldn't tell from inside the café."

Dr. Martin Brenner squeezes the bag holding the teacup. "Let's find out who Ms. Sabrina Smith really is, shall we?"

7. Little Green Men

Hey guys! I hope you are enjoying my take on season 3, with the addition of strange Ms. Sabrina Smith, who is her very own mystery.

It really means so much to me that you would read my work, so thank you! Please review, follow and favorite333

Now, let's get on with the show.

Chapter Seven: Little Green Men

Hopper invites Joyce to dine at the second fanciest restaurant in town. It's not that he can't afford the best—he prefers this place. It's more relaxed, has great Italian—and wouldn't be as intimidating for either of them.

Joyce is running late, which is fine. Give's him a chance to have a quick pre-dinner smoke.

She arrives five minutes later. "Hey, Hop, sorry, I..." she scratches her head, then shakes it. "Never mind. Thanks for inviting me." She sits across from him and takes a sip of the water waiting for her there.

"It's good to see you," and he means it in more ways than one. Her hair has grown long and she's taken on a more youthful glow. Being grateful to have both her sons alive and well again has changed her outlook on a lot of things, including her own self care. "It's been too long. How's Will doing?"

"He's great, thanks. Getting taller every day. And umm...Jane?" she asks, her voice going into a whisper.

"The best. Yeah, she's a spitfire for sure. She's starting a band with Max and Lucas. Real cool kid. I don't know what I'm gonna do," he admits, chuckling.

"Oh wow...I wonder if Will..."

"He should join them! That would be pretty cool. Bitchin' as El would say." He coughs to cover his mistake. "Jane, I mean." His eyes dart

around the room.

Joyce shakes her head. "I don't think I can do this anymore, Hop."

"What do you mean?"

"This," she gestures around her, "town. It's, it's...haunted. At least for me. I know it is for Will. And Jane. I'm thinking of moving. We've got family in California—distant relatives, but still. We could start a new life there. I think we need to if we ever want to move on from everything that's happened."

"I'm not so sure that's in the cards for us," he admits in a low tone.

"Why not?"

He shakes his head. If he tells her, he'd only be putting her in more unnecessary danger. "I don't know...So California, huh? Where were you thinking?"

"San Francisco," she says, but leans in, concerned. "Seriously, Hop, is everything okay? You would tell me if you were in some kind of danger, wouldn't you?"

He smiles, trying to brush off her unease. "Everything's fine. I just mean, you know, Jane would never want to leave Hawkins. All her friends are here."

"Right. I know she and Mike are very close. Will still hasn't found a girlfriend, but I think he's just a late bloomer when it comes to that. It'll be easier for him in California where no one knows what happened..."

"When are you thinking of going?"

"Next month, maybe. Work has slowed down to a crawl now that that damn mall just opened...you know, I can't believe how fast they built that thing. It's destroying business in this town..." She stops talking because Hopper has begun to violently cough. "Hey, are you okay?"

He coughs into his napkin and sees blood, but hides it. "Yeah, yeah, it's the damn cigarettes. Kid's been asking me to quit. Maybe I should

listen."

"Yeah. You don't sound so good, Hop."

He clears his throat. "I'm fine. Really." He looks around, and shouts, "Can we get some service around here?" In his lap, he folds his napkin, hiding the bloody stain.

Across town:

Sabrina lets herself in to her little rented apartment. Books lie scattered on every surface, even on top of her refrigerator. Her cat stretches and rubs her neck on Sabrina's legs as she sets her bag down. "Hey, little momma. You miss me?" She scratches her fuzzy neck and then goes to fill her bowl with tuna.

Once she's changed into her silk nightgown, Sabrina pours herself a small glass of wine from the bottle she started last night. She turns on her rock salt lamp and lights several candles. Burning sage, she moves the smoking smudge stick over her chest, arms and face several times.

Then, she presses her fingers on the table as though quickly typing, but there is nothing beneath her fingers but wood. She stops to take the first sip of her wine. She returns to her odd typing pantomime, but a few moments later, the room starts to shift and melt. Bright white lights shine in through every window. Her front door crashes open as she collapses onto the kitchen floor.

8. Area 51

Chapter Eight: Area 51

In the morning, Hopper takes longer in the shower than normal. Instead of eating breakfast together like always, El makes herself a bowl of cereal, eating it slowly, waiting for him to come out and tell her about his date with Joyce. There's also the small detail of explaining what happened with Ms. Smith. He's not going to be happy about it. He always said anyone else knowing about her history with the lab is an unacceptable risk. She waits until there are no more cinnamon swirls, sips on the sugary milk, but he is still in the shower, steam coming from the bathroom in waves down the hall.

"I'm going to school!" she calls to him.

To her surprise, she is greeted by a series of hacking coughs. "Okay, kid. I'll see you later," he replies through the door.

Irritated that she was unable to express her concerns, she lets out a burst of energy which shakes the trees down the lane, causing birds to leave their nests and take flight.

On her walk, she runs into Dustin, on his bike. "Hey, El, how's it hangin'?"

"Hey, Dusty. I'm alright."

"You sure? I couldn't help but see the early migration," he tells her, gesturing at the trees.

"Yeah. I'm just concerned about Hopper, and I think something is going on with Ms. Smith."

He shakes his head. "She can't know you were the one who tied Stacey's shoelaces together, trust me."

"It's not that. Come on, let's get Mike and I'll explain." They meet Mike at his house and El spends the rest of the time it takes walking to school to fill them in on what happened yesterday with Billy and

Ms. Smith. When she tells them about the car and then the bizarre prophecy, they are left speechless—a rarity for these two.

"So...what are you gonna do?"

"I have to talk to her again. Try and understand who she is, what she means..."

"Don't you think she must be from the lab?" Mike asks, concerned.

"I don't know. I have this weird feeling it's not that simple..."

#

Instead of going to Homeroom with everyone else, she and Mike take off in the direction of their English class. Math can wait till later, they need to talk now—but when they get there, a man in a suit is opening his briefcase on her desk.

"Where's Ms. Smith?" Mike asks, trying to sound normal. They look into the classroom, but no one else is there.

The man smiles at Mike, then takes an extra moment to stare at El. "Your teacher came down with the flu. I'll be your substitute for now. I'm—"

El shakes her head bitterly and pulls Mike down the hall with her. They take refuge in an empty science room—the one where she destroyed her first Demogorgon.

"That guy has 'government' written all over him," he confirms. "I thought they all left Hawkins."

"We have to find her, Mike. I keep feeling like something bad is going to happen—maybe this is it."

"Do you think you can do it here?"

"Yes." She sits on the floor in the back of the room in a meditative pose with her eyes closed, searching her mind for her lost teacher.

Mike keeps his eyes on her and the door, careful that no one should

enter and see what they're doing.

#

Not very far away, underground:

Sabrina Smith wakes up sitting down. She wants to scratch her nose, but finds she can't move her hand. Opening her eyes, her vision is blurry, but she can make out the restraints around her wrists. "Ah," she tugs at tightly clasped straps.

When she finds there is no budging them right now, she takes a moment to assess her surroundings. She is sitting behind a metal table in front of a two way mirror. White tiles line the walls. A camera is mounted in the corner facing her. It's little red light is on. The door is made of a heavy metal and is locked shut with a code.

She starts to focus her mind on turning the red light on the keypad green. She visualizes it, and then the red light does turn green—but not because she did anything to affect it. The door swings open and a man with perfectly quaffed white hair, in a finely tailored grey suit, enters the room.

Dr. Brenner pulls the chair out across from her and sits. "Who are you?"

She leans back. "I knew that people in small towns were curious about strangers but this is just ridiculous," she jokes, showing she's still in good humor.

He smiles, nodding. "We know that you aren't Sabrina Smith." He raises his eyebrows. "What made you think you could just waltz into this town unnoticed?"

"I didn't," she replies, deadly serious.

"You wanted us to find you?" he asks, incredulous.

Her expression is dark. "I came to warn you to stop what you're doing."

He shakes his head, amazed at her audacity. "Who do you work for?"

"Listen to me. Stop. Now-while you still have a chance. You have no idea what you're playing with. If you thought those creatures were bad..." she clenches her hands into fists.

"What did you say?"

She leans forward threateningly, even though she's tied down. "If you don't stop, you'll unleash hell on Earth."

He stares at her with hateful intensity. "And how is it that you think you know what's going on here?"

She shakes her head. "You have to stop. Leave the girl and her friends alone. They don't deserve what's coming."

He leans forward. "What do you know about her?" She doesn't reply. "Did the Russians send you?" Still, no answer. He turns to the door. "Bring it in, please," he calls to the men on the other side.

Two large orderlies enter the room, wheeling in a metal tray lined with needles and vials.

Dr. Brenner stands next to Sabrina, picking up a syringe and slowly filling it with a clear fluid. "You're going to tell me what I want to know, whether you want to or not."

"Stop. You've been warned."

Then the lights go out. When they come back on, the chair is empty, the restraints clasped around nothing but air.

9. Sailor Moon

Chapter Nine: Sailor Moon

Robin hates working at *Scoops Ahoy*. She feels degraded every time she puts on her uniform, looking like she's freaking Sailor Moon or something. The only thing that makes work tolerable is the intolerable Steve Harrington.

She reminds herself that this is a temporary summer job to help pay for art school once she gets in. emI wonder where Steve will end up going/em...probably some prestigious state school. He would get his degree, find a little woman in a year or three, get married and have a big house with two garages, wasting his life selling insurance. She tries to imagine him painting in the studio with her, but then her mind shifts to him modeling for her...lost in fantasy, she bumps into a janitor walking in the opposite direction. "Shit, sorry!" she says, but he doesn't turn around or acknowledge her in any way.

The mall is nearly empty, as it always is before opening. Robin usually closes, but today her manager had called in sick and asked for her to take the morning shift. She doesn't really mind. She's home schooled, so she can just catch up on her studies later. The money for school is the most important thing to her. Though her parents are well off, they always told her that she was responsible for her own future.

She hears a strange electronic beeping coming from the wing behind her, where the janitor was headed. Since she's early anyway, she decided to follow her curiosity back towards the noise.

The janitor is staring at the wall, his face right up to it, which is *concerning*. She's about to ask him if he's okay, when an elevator door moves up the wall before him. It's like nothing she's ever seen, so flat it appears to integrate into the wall itself as it moves. "What the hell?" she whispers.

He steps inside the mysterious blue elevator and the door closes behind him. It moves back down the wall, and she rushes up to look at it, but by the time she reaches it, it's a normal wall again.

Touching the blank, flat wall, she wonders if she can believe her own eyes...She bangs on the wall, but it only results in her making her hand sore, so she decides to head back to the ice cream shop. Still, she can't shake the feeling that she just saw something she shouldn't have.

Once she's back at the ice cream shop, it's business as usual. She turns on the register, opens the ice cream canisters in the display, and tidies up the counter. In the back room she makes sure all of the silverware is clean and accounted for.

She sees a shadow out of the corner of her eye, and when she turns around, she find a woman hiding behind a stack of boxes.

Robin gasps in shock, but the woman holds her hands out to her. "Please, I need your help."

At Hawkins Middle School:

"He has her, Mike." El is shaking with fear. She doesn't want to face this. Not yet. She needs more time to be a normal girl. She doesn't want this. But she isn't normal. She never will be, and eventually, she'll have to face her greatest demons.

"So... she's working with him?"

El shakes her head. "I'm not sure. It looked like he was interrogating her..."

"Do you know where?"

"I have a feeling, but it doesn't make any sense."

"What do you mean?"

"Come on, I'll tell you on the way." She grabs his hand and they run into the hallway.

"And just where do you two think you're going?" the substitute asks, blocking the path leading to the exit.

In the Starcourt Mall:

Seemingly out of nowhere, teams of mall cops sweep the wings, searching for the missing prisoner.

Robin peeks out from the back room in shocked silence, watching them stop to interrogate store workers across the cafeteria.

She turns to the woman hiding. "What the hell is going on?"

"Please. You don't know me yet, but I know you. I know that you're a good person-"

"Wow, A+. Now, get out. I can't protect you from whatever it is you're running from."

"You're an artist. A painter. You paint abstractly, intuitively. It's in your nature. You understand the forms of things."

"How do you know that I paint?"

"I told you. *I know you*, Robin. I can't explain how, but I need your help. *Please*, I have to get out of here."

Robin shakes her head. "This is bullshit."

"When you were four your mother gave you a stuffed lion for your birthday that you named Azriel. He went everywhere with you. You even lost him in an airport bathroom once, but your mother went back with you to find him."

Robin is thunderstruck. What she says is true. "Who are you?"

"A friend."

For reasons she doesn't quite comprehend, she nods in assent. "Come on, I'm parked out back."

They sneak off to her car, a beat up red AMC Eagle. The cops spot them and phone it in, and now the whole brigade is after them.

Cruiser after cruiser screeches into action, driving wildly at them.

"I have to go now, Robin," Sabrina says in a quiet, guilty way.

"Look, I'm driving as fast as I can!" she swerves away from an oncoming cruiser. "Shit!"

"When the sky is black and red, and there is no morning, go find the little yellow house on East End. In the attic, there is a door..."

"Are you out of your mind?" Robin asks, continuing to swerve away from near collisions.

"I'm sorry." Sabrina closes her eyes and every car speeding towards them stops moving. All of their batteries die at once. They get out of the vehicles in shock as Robin drives towards the front gates.

"How did you..." she starts to ask, but no one is sitting beside her. The woman disappeared and Robin is left alone in front of the locked gates. "No!" She sees a horde of men walking towards her car.

Unsure of what to do, she pages Steve: *Help! At the mall.*

A very tall, stern looking officer knocks on her window. "Ma'am, please step out of the vehicle."

She opens the door and he drags her out of the car. "Hey, get off me!" They cuff her and drag her back towards the mall.

10. Closed for Construction

Chapter Ten: Closed for Construction

Robin looks on in shock as they lead her through the mess of police cruisers sitting scattered and dead in the parking lot.

Dr. Brenner is waiting for them at the entrance. "Where is the woman she was with?"

"No one else was in the vehicle with her," the officer reports.

"The cameras clearly show the woman getting in the car with the girl, sir," an agent to his left disagrees.

"Where did she go?" he asks Robin, curious.

"I want to call my parents," she says, ignoring his question.

"Bring her downstairs."

"You can't do this!" she shouts as they drag her into the mall, towards the elevator that doesn't exist. "Let me go!" The wall starts to move and the elevator doors appear. They drag her inside, Brenner right beside them. She must know something. He'll find out soon enough.

#

At Hawkins Middle:

"Where do you think you're going?" the substitute repeats, when all of a sudden Max skates down the hallway.

"Oh, hey guys!" she calls to them behind him.

He flips around, wildly pointing his finger at her. "Hey! You can't ride that inside!"

"Huh?" she says, pretending she can't hear him, continuing to skating around.

"You can't do that!" he shouts at her.

El and Mike are able to sneak passed him because he's so focused on trying to stop Max, and then the fire alarm goes off. Down the hall, Lucas gives them a thumbs up from in front of the handle he just pulled so they can run outside before everyone else does.

#

They ride their bikes up to the gates of the mall. It should be open by now, but the gate is still locked and they can see several police cruisers scattered around the parking lot. Something is definitely going on here.

Steve drives up beside them.

"What are *you* doing here?"

"I got a cryptic message from Robin. What are you two doing here? It's a school day!"

"We're looking for our teacher."

"*Here?*"

"Can you help us get in?"

"I mean, the mall should be open...let me see what I can find out first, okay? Hang back here."

Steve hops the fence and goes to talk with one of the officers. "Hey, officer. What's going on here?"

The man looks him up and down. "Shouldn't you be in school?"

"Yeah, umm, I got a call from my manager asking me to come in and help out. I work at Scoop's Ahoy...so, yeah. Is there a reason the mall isn't open yet?"

"Let me get this straight. When you came here and saw that the fence was closed, your first thought was to jump it and come inside?"

Steve holds up his hands defensively as the officer steps towards him. "Hey, I'm not looking for trouble, sir. I was just confused."

The officer receives a message on his walkie. He listens and then looks at Steve. "Get out. The mall is closed for construction."

"What construction?"

"Do I need to tell you again?" he asks, reaching for his cuffs.

"No, no, sir, sorry," Steve stutters, backing up.

He finds El and Mike hiding in the bushes near his car. "Get in. We have to go."

"We can't just leave if we know that people are in danger," Mike argues. "What about your friend?"

"Well, how do you plan on getting in? Closed down, this place is a fortress."

"Leave it to me," El assures him.

#

Underground:

Robin bangs on the door of the interrogation room. "Let me out of here! My parents are going to sue you for this!"

Dr. Brenner enters the room. "Why don't you sit down, hmm?"

"Let me out," she demands, standing her ground.

"I can't do that. Not yet. The woman you helped escape. How do you know her?"

"I *don't*."

"If you don't know her, why run from the police?"

"I don't know. It seemed like the right move. Considering you're interrogating me inside the basement of a *mall*, I guess I was right."

"Before you fled, we caught you on camera following one of our men. Why did you do that, if you weren't looking for her?"

"I heard a noise. I was just curious."

"I'm curious too—curious why she chose to appear to you."

"I told you. She needed my help. I wasn't going to just let her get caught by mall *goons*."

He nods, considering this. "What happened to all of the batteries in the police cruisers?"

"How the hell should I know?"

"Did she do something when she was in the car with you?"

"No."

"She didn't say anything to you?"

"No."

"I find that hard to believe."

Robin shrugs, pursing her lips. "As long you believe that my parents are going to *sue* you if you don't let me out of here *right now*."

"Your parents aren't coming for you, Robin. No one knows you're here. Maybe you ran away. Young people so often do. It's an epidemic."

"You're not serious..."

He raises an eyebrow and waves at someone on the other side of the two way mirror. Two men enter the room and grab hold of her arms.

"Let me go!"

"Now, these men are going to bring you to your room so that you can think things over."

"No!" she screams as they drag her out and down the hallway. She

manages to elbow one in the eye, and she shoves him off her, but the other one wraps his arms around her chest, pulling her back. Her legs kick out wildly as the one she knocked down gets up and grabs his taser. He holds it up to her neck and clicks it on, so that it only misses her throat by a fraction of an inch.

"That's enough," Brenner commands. "I think she's learned her lesson, yes?"

Her breathing is ragged as she nods, rocking back against the man holding her. "Yes," she says in a small voice, and they take her away.

.

.

.

COMING SOON - Chapter Eleven: Return of the Jedi

11. Return of the Jedi

Chapter Eleven: Return of the Jedi

Outside in the school yard, Nancy is arguing with the middle school Principal. "What do you mean, 'He ran away?' I'm supposed to pick him up." She shares an irritated look with Jonathan.

"I'm telling you what happened. They decided to cut school. Probably went to the park or something. Kids have no sense of responsibility these days."

Nancy's eyes open into saucers, and Jonathan knows he should try to say something before she explodes. "Hey, listen, we're just trying to understand. So Mike and Jane left—about what time?"

"When the fire alarm was triggered, around 8:30," Principal Griffin estimates.

Will walks over to his brother. "Hey," he says, side-eyeing the principal.

"Excuse us," Jonathan says, and the principal walks away, happy to attend to other matters.

"We helped them take off," Will shares, while Max, Lucas and Dustin walk over to join them.

"Why, what's going on?" Jonathan does not like the sound of this.

"There's something weird about our English teacher. She has powers, like El," Max tells them in hushed tones.

"What?" Nancy never thought anyone could be quite like El...

"This morning she went to go talk to her, but Ms. Smith wasn't there. Then our substitute was acting all aggressive, so we helped them get away. They're probably looking for her now."

"Do you know where they were headed?" Jonathan asks.

"No," Max says, feeling guilty. She wishes she had caught up with them...

"My mom is going to be pissed," Nancy warns.

Will nods. "Can you cover for him for now?"

"I'll do my best...but what about Hopper? He's going to freak when he finds out."

"El will have to deal with that when she's done doing whatever it is she's doing."

#

Beyond the gate, El clears her mind and closes her eyes. She reaches out to the electrical grid powering the mall. She can feel the energy surging to one particular source. With all of her mental strength, she squeezes until something snaps. All of the lights in the building go out and the gate clicks open.

"Come on, I know a back way in," Steve offers, and Mike and El follow him through the parking lot to a back door used for employees.

Inside, everything is dark, tinged with an otherworldly blue—silent sirens have been triggered—ones attached to a backup generator El didn't know was there.

No one is around because all of the stores remain closed; it's ghostly quiet.

"So what's the plan?" Steve asks, not sure at all what they are even doing here. And where the hell is Robin? What does she have to do with any of this?

"Quiet," El warns, looking around the corner.

Two mall cops pass by. They stand stunned when they see the men carrying large guns.

Mike suddenly realizes that they came here too quickly, too rashly...

"El, what if it's a trap? We have to go back," he whispers close to her lips.

"We can't turn back. I can feel her, Mike. She's here, and she's afraid. She needs my help."

Mike shakes his head in fear. "I need you too. I need you to be okay, to not get hurt again."

"I can't just hide. I have to stand my ground and do what's right." She kisses him passionately on the lips and then walks off, following the men with guns.

#

Hopper decided not to go to work today. He needs to take it easy, lay low. He doesn't want El to see him like this, though. He starts the tea kettle, then leans on the stove, bracing himself for another fit of coughing. He's begun to sweat and has the feeling he's become feverish. *Shit*. The water screams to a boil.

#

Behind the cops, El moves swiftly and silently as a mouse. Then, she reaches into the sound system and suddenly "The Power of Love" blasts through every speaker.

The men whip around wildly, aiming their guns at lifeless mannequins in store windows. "What the...?"

She focuses on Sam Goody, turning on all of the lights in that store, then the one next to it, then she moves the lights down the wing to the tune of the music.

Stronger and harder than a bad girl's dream. Make a bad one good...

This is enough of a distraction to disorient the men, so that when she shatters the window of the store behind them, they hardly notice. They *do* notice when she uses her telekinesis to lift the shattered glass up, surrounding them with threatening shards. Stunned, she also tears the guns out of their hands with her mind, tossing them into the surprised arms of Mike and Steve.

"Umm, yeah, cool," Steve stammers. "What are we doing, exactly?"

"Bring us to the lab."

The men share a look, trying to determine the best course of action.

The music screeches to a halt and the lights turn off again. "Now."

Mike really wants to grab her hand and get the hell out of there—but he has no choice. She made up her mind, and he would follow her, even to the edge of doom, if he had to.

The men lead them to the secret elevator, which is when they realize that the power outage did nothing to affect the lab—it runs on a backup generator. Once the doors close, El sees the camera in the corner, so she cracks the lens.

Mike and Steve continue to aim their guns uncertainly at the men, who stand silently perturbed in the center.

The doors open to a familiar looking hall. Though she knows this is not the same lab where she was held in captivity for twelve years, a shiver of dread runs through her. She can sense the same kind of energy here, the same bad intentions... "Let's get them and get the hell out of here."

"Agreed," Mike confirms, and they start walking slowly down the hall.

Every hallway they turn down is filled with rows of locked metal doors. "This place is a maze," Steve complains. "Maybe we should split up."

El nods, even though she doesn't actually want to lose sight of him. She can't protect him if she can't see him. "Be careful," she warns.

#

Robin sits on the edge of a stiff bed, in shock. They made her change into a hospital gown and took away her uniform. For the first time in her life she wishes she was wearing it. They didn't even give her socks. "What the hell is going on here?" she had asked the orderly

who handed her the gown, but he only shoved her back and slammed the door, locking it behind him.

#

Steve rushes down hallway after hallway, calling out to Robin in a hushed whisper. *What if she isn't even down here?* Doubt and regret start tugging at the corners of his mind, but he pushes them down, sure that something wicked is afoot here, in need of rectifying.

"Robin?" he calls down the next hall, which looks exactly like the last.

Banging comes from inside a room a few doors down. "Hey! Let me out of here! You can't do this!"

He rushes to the door. "Robin! It's Steve!" He tries to turn the handle, but of course, it's locked.

"You actually came for me?" she says, shocked. "Wow...thank you...I guess I can't make fun of you anymore."

"Don't get ahead of yourself," he warns, jokingly. "I need you to get away from the door. I'm going to shoot the lock."

"Okay." She backs up as far as she can, so that she's sitting on her knees on the bed.

He shoots, and the door swings open. Seeing her sitting there in a hospital gown is enough to make his whole body shake. What were they planning on doing to her down here? There's no time to think about it. He drops the gun on a small metal nightstand as she rushes into his arms, squeezing him tightly in an embrace, tears running down her cheeks.

"I didn't know what was going to happen to me," she admits, pressing her face into his shoulder.

"It's okay. I've got you. I won't let anyone hurt you," he promises.

The sound of stomping down the hall makes them both turn in fear. He reaches for the gun, but it's too late. A team of soldiers aim their guns at them through the open door.

#

Mike and El continue to search the labyrinthine lab to no avail. El tries to reach out with her mind in order to sense Sabrina, but she can't quite do it while on the move.

"How are we gonna find her?" Mike asks, nervous, the gun feeling heavier in his hands with every step.

"I don't know," El admits, a sinking feeling settling into her stomach. She stops walking. "Let me try something." She closes her eyes, reaching out with her mind to the people down in the lab. She hears voices overlapping, including Steve finding Robin, and then she hears a voice she didn't expect to hear at all...

El rushes down the hallway, making several turns, following the sound, until she's facing the door which houses the person she now feared facing almost as much as Papa.

She cracks the door open with her mind to find Kali, curled in the fetal position.

"Kali," El whispers, kneeling by the bed so that they are eye to eye. "It's me. It's Jane." At first Kali doesn't react, and El suddenly realizes how sick she looks. There are deep dark circles under her eyes, and she is shaking, sweating, with a high fever. Her skin is burning... "Come on, I'm going to get you out of here."

With Mike's help, they lift Kali up and begin dragging her down the hall in between them, struggling to hold her up as they attempt their escape. All thought of Sabrina is gone for the moment. Right now, El needs to get Kali out of here. She can regroup later.

"This way," Kali tells them, gesturing to the right with her head.

They pull her along, and as they do, she whispers to El, "Let us heal our wounds," harkening back to what she said in the warehouse. El wishes she could say something to make this better, but she can't. She feels responsible for what's happened to her sister. She was the one who found Ray in the first place. It was her fault that Brenner caught wind of Kali at all.

"Just a little further," Kali promises.

After another few left turns, El starts to feel like maybe this isn't the right way, but Kali keeps gesturing for them to go forward, so she listens. Mike struggles to hold the gun and keep Kali up, so he's following along, not really sure of his surroundings.

"There," Kali points to a set of large double doors with a glowing Exit sign hanging above them.

"Are you sure?" Mike asks.

"Yes, I'm sure."

He pushes the doors open, and they step outside into the parking lot—but it's the wrong one. El looks up, horrified to see that they are standing outside of the original lab...and then she realizes her mistake.

"What did you do?" she asks Kali, horrified.

"I'm sorry, Jane. You made your choice and now I've made mine."

The illusion of being outside disappears into nothing but an empty white room.

.

.

.

COMING SOON - Chapter 12: Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test

12. Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test

Thank you so much for reading! Writing this fanfic is such an incredible pleasure because I get to share my love of these wonderful characters with you. Please remember to review, follow and favorite if you'd like. I'm posting almost every day, but I can only do that with your support.

xoxo

Chapter 12: Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test

The doors behind them click closed, and a red light blips on the keypad, signaling that they are locked in.

"No!" Mike lets Kali fall onto the hard white tiles. "Where did you take us?" he demands, aiming the gun at her head.

"Mike!" El shouts, moving the gun away from Kali with her mind. She looks wildly around the room. It is completely empty, save for a long one-way mirror planted in the center of the wall.

"Why?" she asks Kali, shocked by this betrayal.

Kali starts coughing uncontrollably, spitting blood onto the pearly white floor. "He said he'd give me the cure if I helped him."

"Cure?" El asks, confused.

A hissing noise comes from the vents, and then a thick gas fills the room.

El reaches for Mike, and they hold each other as they both slide to the floor, unconscious.

#

Max fidgets with the ring Sabrina gave her, remembering her bizarre prophecy. "When the sky turns black and red...find the little yellow house on East End," she recites quietly, trying to interpret some kind of meaning from the madness.

"Huh?" Lucas asks, absentmindedly strumming his guitar, trying to kill time.

"When we spoke to Ms. Smith, that's what she said. When the sky turns black and red..."

Lucas looks out the window. "It looks sunny to me."

Max sighs. "Maybe she didn't mean today...I don't know. What's the forecast for this week?"

Lucas shrugs. "I think it's supposed to rain on the weekend, but, I don't know. I don't recall a time when the sky was ever *red*."

"Yeah, I know. It's stupid."

"It's not. You're trying to help out, but we can't really do anything until they get back."

"What if they don't? What if something went wrong?"

"Hey, hey, don't think like that." He puts the guitar down and rubs her arms, trying to relax her, but she pulls away.

"I can't *relax*, Lucas. I need to *do* something." She stands up, an idea beginning to form.

"What are you gonna do?"

"First, I'm going to find that house. I don't care what color the sky is. Then, I don't know, I think we should check out the mall."

"The *mall*? *Really*?" Lucas is more shocked by that suggestion than anything that's happened yet today. "How can you go shopping at a time like this?"

Max rolls her eyes. "*Jesus*, Lucas. Can you just trust me? El said she saw someone she recognized from the lab there—a janitor or someone. If the house doesn't pan out, that's my best bet."

"Okay, but first, I think we should call Hopper. He'd want to know what's going on."

Max nods nervously. This isn't going to be an easy conversation...

#

In his room, Will looks at the photographs he has of last Halloween, when they were all dressed up like ghostbusters. He wishes he could go back to that day and live it without the horrors that came after.

He opens the bottom drawer of his dresser and pulls out a stack of papers. On the bottom of the pile, he pulls out his first drawing of the Mind Flayer, before it got him. His hands begin to shake involuntarily, and he drops the drawing. He steps on it, over and over, but the image remains. Picking it back up, he's ready to tear it to shreds when his eyes roll in the back of his head.

In his mind he sees a strange window suspended in a cage-like room. Through the window there is darkness and dust, and from it stretches a long, smokey tendril. The Mind Flayer is reaching out, trying to find his way back to them...

#

Hopper grips the handle of the phone like he's trying to crush it. "Let me get this straight. You thought it would be a good idea to help them ditch school to find your English teacher, who has *powers*, and you didn't think to mention this to me *before* they took off to God knows where?"

"I'm sorry. There was no time...but to be honest, what El does and doesn't tell you is up to her," Max replies defensively.

"Yeah, kid, I know. I'm sorry, I just—" he slips into another fit of coughing. "I'm not feeling my best and this has got me worried. You haven't heard from her at all?" He checks the time. It's already ten past six.

"No, we haven't, from either of them."

"*Shit*. Okay. Let's figure this out. Where—"

"We have a few ideas but, I don't know if we should say over the phone. We'll call back if we find anything." Max hangs up, unsure if

she just did the right thing. She shouldn't have even mentioned Sabrina, but she's pretty sure whoever might be listening already knows. They *don't* know about the prophecy or where Max intends to go looking. "Let's go."

#

A loud buzzer goes off and a woman in a lab coat enters the room, taking the seat across from Robin. She pulls a small deck of cards from her front pocket.

"I want to see, Steve."

"My name is Dr. Keller. I'll be working with you today." She begins shuffling the cards.

"I don't think you heard me. I want to see *Steve*. What have you done with him?" she asks, squeezing the metal seat of her chair until her hands ache.

The doctor ignores her question as an orderly comes into the room. He places some kind of stand on the table. When he's done, he walks over to the cabinet behind Robin and pulls out a glass bottle filled with some kind of red liquid. He pours a glass of it and places it on the table in front of her.

"I'm not drinking that."

"Aren't you thirsty?" Dr. Keller asks, raising an eyebrow.

Robin pushes her seat back and crosses her arms. "Where. Is. Steve?"

"I'd be happy to tell you, but I'll need you to drink that first."

Robin shakes her head, amazed. "I'm not falling for *whatever* this is."

"I thought you wanted to see your friend?"

"I *do*."

The doctor shrugs, looking at the drink.

"What is it?"

"Just some fruit punch. You need to keep your sugar up," she says lightly.

"Kool-Aid?" Robin asks, her eyes wide. "You've gotta be kidding me."

"Are you going to cooperate or not?" Dr. Keller asks, seemingly bored by her refusals.

Robin stares back at her, expressionless. "You people are insane."

"Alright. We'll bring you back to your room then. Maybe your friend will be more willing to cooperate with us." She signals for the orderly but Robin grabs the glass with both hands.

"Promise I can see him, and that you'll leave him alone. *Promise.*" The glass is shaking in her hands.

"I promise," Dr. Keller says, offering a look of pity.

Robin takes a tiny sip and puts it back down. It just tastes like fruit punch, which is a relief.

"I'll need you to drink all of it," the doctor presses.

Robin chugs it, slamming the glass back on the metal table when she's finished.

"Good girl," Dr. Keller condescends, walking over to the cabinet and retrieving a stethoscope. "Now, I'm just going to listen to your heart, and then we'll begin, okay?"

Robin turns around in confusion. "What? *No.* You said I could see him."

"And you will, but first we need to do a little test." She rolls over a stool that was in the corner so that she can sit next to Robin. "Just relax and breath normally for me."

Robin focuses on a tile in the corner of the room while Dr. Keller listens to her heart.

"Okay, good. Thank you." She returns to her seat across the table, jotting down measurements on her chart. "Now, I'm going to pull a card from this deck, and you will tell me what shape I'm looking at." She shows her the five possible shapes: star, wave, cross, circle, and square. She reshuffles the deck. "Are you ready to begin?"

Robin presses her palms over her eyes. She can't believe what's happening. When she lifts her hands away, she is shocked to see the doctor look like a distorted Picasso painting. "What did you give me?"

"I need you to focus now, Robin." Dr. Keller pulls the first card and places it on the stand. "What shape is it?"

The walls are vibrating, and somehow she can hear the ocean. "A wave."

Dr. Keller shows no indication of this being right or wrong. She pulls the next card. "And now?"

"Why are you doing this?"

"What *shape*, Robin?"

"*I don't know*," she replies, but Keller just continues to stare at her until she answers. "A circle."

Keller pulls the next card.

"Star. Cross. Cross..." This process goes on until she's guess twenty-five times. "Now can I see Steve?"

"How are you feeling?"

"*Fine*," she says, watching the white tiles glow red through the cracks.

"Good. Now we'll redo the test, to check for average consistency."

"No!"

"Just relax, Robin. Take a deep breath."

She shakes her head wildly, jumping out of her seat. "You said I could

see him. You *promised*. I did your stupid little test, and now I need to go." She rushes to the door, tugging on the handle, but it is of course locked. The orderly grabs her arms from behind, dragging her back to her chair.

"Calm down. If you just follow my directions this will go so much more smoothly. Then I can bring Steve in to see you, okay?"

Robin relaxes back into her chair. "Okay."

They run the test again, and this time Robin answers much more quickly, trying to get it over with. Dr. Keller again does not remark on accuracy, only jotting down the results on her clipboard. "Good. Now just sit tight," she tells her, leaving the room.

Robin drops her head into her hands in despair. What do they want from her? Why are they drugging her? Testing her? None of it makes any sense. She wishes she could disappear into the darkness of her palms, where the world is black and red...

The buzzer goes off and Robin lifts her head up to see them drag Steve into the room. They've also forced him into a hospital gown that is much too short for his comfort. The orderly shoves him into the chair opposite Robin's.

She bursts out laughing. "You look good in a dress."

He smiles at her, shaking his head. "I thought you said you were going to stop making fun of me."

"That was when I thought you were going to rescue me," she says lightly, but then the weight of her words hits her and her smile disappears. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have paged you. Did they hurt you?"

"No, no, no, *hey*, it's okay. I'm glad you did. I couldn't imagine working a day at *Scoop's Ahoy* without you. Are you kidding me? No way."

"I think I see now why the children like you. You're funny, Steve Harrington."

"And you...you..." he looks at her, unsure of what to say. She looks paler than normal, and her eyes have a kind of crazed look in them. Something is definitely wrong. "Are you okay?"

"They gave me Kool-Aid," she whispers, looking sheepishly at the two way mirror across from her. Is someone watching them on the other side of it? Probably. "What are you doing back there, huh?" she asks, standing up. "We have *rights*, you know!"

"Kool-Aid," he repeats. "They drugged you?"

She starts pacing and biting her nails. "We have to get out of here."

"We will. I promise."

The buzzer goes off again and Dr. Keller returns. "Now that you two have had a chance to talk, let's proceed, shall we?"

"With what?" Steve asks, annoyed and disgusted by this fake show of pleasantries.

Dr. Keller hands him the strange deck of cards and explains that he is to look at each one and wait for a response from Robin, but that he should not make it known whether she is right or wrong. "I'll be sitting with you to ensure that you do the test correctly."

Steve shakes his head. "You've got to be kidding. I'm not doing this."

"Now, please..."

"Why are you even bothering with us? I know who you people are. You *tortured* that poor girl her whole life. *Eleven*? You're *sick*. Well I'm not about to play along. Find yourself someone else to mess with."

"I had hoped that you would work with me on this. Alright," Dr. Keller shrugs, signaling for the orderlies. One comes in and grabs Robin, pulling her out of her seat.

"What are you doing? Get off of her!" An orderly holds him back as they drag her out.

"Take her to exam room 13," Keller orders. Then, to Steve, "We'll be

giving her a treatment now, which means we won't be able to try this again until tomorrow." The door slams closed behind her.

.

.

.

Coming Soon — Chapter 13: There's No Place Like Home

13. There's No Place Like Home

Chapter 13: There's No Place Like Home

Max and Lucas ride their bikes up and down East End, but there is no sign of a little yellow house. The closest they get is finding a big orange garage. No luck.

"I don't understand. It should be here," Max says after their third time down the block, mad at herself for believing something so crazy.

Lucas shrugs, disappointed. "Maybe she was lying. Think about it. What do we really know about Ms. Smith, other than she really likes the works of William Shakespeare?"

"We know that she can control moving vehicles with her mind," she snaps back.

"That doesn't mean she's trustworthy."

"Don't you think I know that?"

"I know it's hard, but can you *try* not to bite my head off every three seconds?"

"I'm sorry. It's just...I don't know what to do."

"You said you wanted to check the mall." He checks the time. "It's a quarter to eight. That means we have just over an hour to get to there and check it out before closing."

Max nods, unconvinced they will be any more successful there, but she's unwilling to stop now.

#

Back in the lab, Brenner watches Eleven on the other side of the two way mirror.

"Are you certain the glass will hold?"

"It's reinforced with solid steel, sir," his lead security agent assures him.

"Good." He watches her sitting against the wall of the concrete room. She looks furious, but calm. He presses the button for the intercom. "Hello, Eleven." Her expression remains stony. "How are you feeling?"

"I'm not staying here. You can open the door, or I will."

He swallows hard, becoming irritated. He isn't used to her talking back. "I understand that this is difficult. You've enjoyed your freedom—but people are dying. Your sister is very ill, and you could help her. Don't you want to try?"

"What are you talking about?"

"We've lost two so far. We don't know much about it, but we do know it starts as a cough. Then the fever comes. Chills. Exhaustion sets in, aching everywhere. Then the patient goes into shock, and they forget who they are. The final stages...well, it's not a way for anyone to die. Kali is the third to show signs of the illness. We've now located a fourth."

"If you did this..." She imagines his scientists developing a bioweapon to use against the world. She sends violent energy against the four walls of her new cage. The steel nails holding the mirror in place vibrate angrily.

Brenner shoots a dangerous look at his security agent. Then, to Eleven, "We think it came from the tear in reality you created—which is why it's so important for you to cooperate with us. You may possess the key to a cure."

Guilt floods her mind. She stops pushing energy against the walls and looks at the floor. *No. It can't be true. I didn't do this...*

"It's alright. You're home now, Eleven."

He places his hand on the glass as though to touch her as she stares back in horror at her own reflection.

#

The mall is packed and buzzing like a new battery. Max and Lucas search everywhere, but there's no sign of anything strange. She looks at every janitor she finds, but doesn't even know who she's looking for.

Will is there with Joyce, buying luggage.

"Planning a vacation?" Lucas asks, jealous, but happy for him at the same time.

Will looks nervous. "Umm...no."

Lucas gives him a weird look. "Okay. Have you heard from Dustin?"

"I called his house but his mom said he was feeling sick."

"Oh, man."

"Any word from Mike?" Will hopes his mother doesn't notice what he's saying.

"Why? Have you not heard from him, honey?" Joyce asks in earnest. She catches *everything* these days.

"No, no. It's just umm, for a project."

"A *science* project," Max adds, trying to be helpful.

"What's the project about?" Joyce aims to sound nonchalant, but doesn't.

"Umm...that's what we need to decide."

"Uh-huh. Okay. Listen, whatever you kids are up to, I want to be notified if anything happens. *Anything*. Do you understand?"

All of the kids quickly reply in the affirmative, so she knows they're lying.

"Where's El?"

This time, Max can answer honestly. "I have no clue."

#

Several floors beneath where they are standing, El closes her eyes and reaches out into the darkness to find Mike. He is screaming and slamming his fists into the steel door until his hands ache and his throat burns. He sits on the floor, looking like a broken marionette.

"Where is she!" he hears Steve screaming from the hall, and then a door slams nearby.

"Steve!" Mike calls, pressing his hands against the wall to his right, but no one answers. "Steve!" He beats his hand on the wall— it hurts, and no one answers. He runs his hands back through his hair and starts to cry. He looks up into the camera with intense hate, wiping his face roughly with his sleeves.

"Mike!" El calls to him in the dark, but of course he cannot hear her. Unless...she knows she can transmit voices through the speaker system—she's done it before. Could she transmit her own? She focuses on sending her voice through the electrical system. "Mike. It's me. Don't worry, I'm going to get you out of here."

Everyone in the lab stares up in amazement at her disembodied voice commanding the speakers.

She clears her throat. "I'd like to speak to you, Papa. Now."

Brenner doesn't like to be commanded, but he is nevertheless impressed with his prize subject's growing powers and even her ill-placed self-assurance. He returns to the viewing room on the other side of the two way mirror and presses the intercom. "I'm here, Eleven."

"I'll stay and help you, but you have to let my friends go. Right now."

"I'm afraid I can't do that. At least not yet."

"That's not good enough. You want my cooperation? Well, I need yours too. They go now, or we all do. Trust me, that won't end well for you."

He considers this ultimatum. The idea of having her full cooperation

is too desirable to pass up. When she was here as a child, she was timid and unsure. Now that she's growing into a confident young woman, her powers are exponentially greater than before and her ability to harness them that much more impressive. This also means he needs new ways to control her. The cell they'd built can't hold her forever if she really wanted to leave. "If you agree to cooperate, I'll send them home tonight. You have my word."

"Deal. But remember, I'll know if you're lying."

"Of course." Brenner is pleased with her decision, unconcerned with losing these pawns for now. She has no idea what new secrets he has ready to use against her when the time comes.

.
.
.

COMING SOON — CHAPTER 14: THE WINDOW

14. The Window

Chapter 14: The Window

Brenner walks down the labyrinthine halls to his new laboratory. They've built an impressive machine housed inside a steel cage. His team should be ready to test it this evening. This works well with his promise to Eleven. He'll let the boys go—on a short leash, of course. As for the girl—well, he has other plans for her...

He steps into the cage, examining the steel framed 'window' hanging in the center. "How much longer?"

The scientists calibrating the machine twitter around him nervously. "We're still stabilizing the electromagnetic field, but it should only be a few more hours," the lead engineer informs him.

"Good." He strokes the outline of the window, imaging another world on the other side of it—one *he* would be in control of this time.

#

The electronic lock on the door beeps like a shrill harpy. An orderly places something on the bed, and then leaves in silence. El looks down at the folded hospital gown and something in her heart snaps.

#

"Let's go," the orderly pushes Mike down the hall.

"No! I'm not leaving without El!"

Steve turns around, offering him a sympathetic expression. He doesn't want to leave without the girls either, but what choice do they have?

"You're lucky you're getting off this easy, kid," the orderly confides.

"This is bullshit." He shoves the man and turns to run back to where he thinks they're holding her, but the man grabs him roughly by the shirt, zaps him with the taser, and pulls him forward, gripping his arms like a vice. "Ah! Get *off* me! El!" He is shocked again, this time

for longer, which leaves him shaking as they drag him towards the elevator.

"Stop it, Jesus Christ, we're going!" Steve complains, horrified to see Mike hurt like this.

"*Move.*"

Before they get into the elevator, Steve asks, "What about Robin?"

"Who?" The orderly grins as the doors slide closed between them.

The elevator opens up and suddenly they are in the back of the mall's parking lot again. The juxtaposition of realities above and below ground is mind bending.

"We need Hopper," Mike says, unsure what to do next. They run through the parking lot, back to where Steve left his car. On their way, they see Joyce closing the trunk of her car. "Mrs. Beyers!"

"Oh! Your friends were looking for you, about some kind of 'science project'?" She looks him up and down. He looks hurt somehow, and his eyes are bloodshot. "Honey, what's wrong?"

Will steps out of the car, his eyes wide with fear.

"It's Brenner. He's alive and...he has El."

"*What?* That awful man...I thought he was...Doctor Owens told us he was gone!"

"Well he's back and he has her. I think she made a deal with him to let us go."

"But...what are you doing *here?*"

Steve steps forward. "They built a new lab under the mall."

"You have to be kidding me."

"They also have my friend Robin, but I don't know what they want with her. We need to get back inside so we can help them."

She runs her hands through her hair, trying to shake out the cobwebs. "I tried calling Hop before, but couldn't get him. Come on, we'll drive over."

#

Ten minutes have passed and El has not put on the hospital gown. She stares at it like a death sentence.

The buzzer goes off and a female doctor enters the white room, gripping a clip board. "Hello, Eleven. My name is Dr. Keller. How are you feeling?"

"What did you do to Ms. Smith? I know she isn't here."

"Sabrina Smith is not who she says she is. In fact, we believe that isn't even her real name."

"You're lying."

"I'm afraid not. She escaped custody and is in the wind—for now. But we have more pressing matters to attend to. We need to run tests to determine your wellness and your ability to help us with the disease plaguing Subject Eight."

"Her name is *Kali*."

"Her condition is deteriorating at an exponential rate. You saw her." She waits for Eleven to reply, but she just keeps a stony gaze. "I know it's difficult for you to accept your position here, but we need to get started." She looks pointedly at the folded gown on the bed.

El shakes her head weakly.

"You agreed to help us. Are you going back on your word?"

"No."

"Good. Now get changed." She waits with her back turned until El is finished. Once on, she helps her by tying the back closed.

El looks back at the two-way mirror, wondering if Papa is behind the

glass and if he actually enjoys seeing her this way. She thinks she knows the answer.

"Come with me."

#

"Hopper! Hop!" Joyce shouts, banging on his front door. No answer comes from inside the house, even after she's rung the doorbell five times. "*Hello?*"

They hear movement on the inside—some kind of banging followed by a violent fit of coughing. When he finally opens the door, they are all shocked to see him look so poorly. He is covered in sweat, his lips and skin are pale and there are dark bags under his bloodshot eyes.

Joyce takes a step back. "You look like *hell*."

"I feel like it." He sees the kids, nodding. "Thanks for bringing her home. I've been so out of it today."

"What, do you mean El? She isn't here, Hop...Can we come inside?"

A hollow fear enters his gut as he opens the door wider to let them in. "Excuse the mess. I-uh, I've been meaning to clean." They sit on the old orange couch and he pulls over a wooden chair from the kitchenette. "So you drove all this way to tell me El isn't with you," he repeats, slowly taking in the dread on their faces.

"This isn't going to be easy for you to hear," she begins, but Mike cuts her off.

"Jesus, just tell him! Brenner is alive and he has El."

The air is sucked out of the room. "What did you say to me?"

"Ms. Sabrina has powers but she disappeared so we went looking for her and we got caught. He only let me and Steve go because she made him."

The absolute worst case scenario has come to pass. Murphy's law. "Where is she now?"

Steve clears his throat. "They built a new lab beneath the mall. I don't know why, but my friend Robin is trapped down there too. "

"The *mall*?" He starts coughing violently again. "I should have known. Seemed like they started building that thing the minute they shut down the lab." He grabs his car keys. "I want you to stay here, kid," he tells Mike. "Steve, come with me. I'm going to need some back up."

"Are you *insane*? I'm coming with you," Mike argues, his eyes wild with anger and determination.

"It's too much of a risk. Brenner will use you against her in a heartbeat."

"I can't just sit around here and wait. This is *El*. I can't lose her again. I *won't*."

"Alright kid, alright."

"Hop, you can't go. You're too sick," Joyce argues.

"Nothing is going to stop me from getting El home safely. *Nothing*. Let's go."

#

Dr. Keller leads El inside the steel cage where Dr. Brenner is waiting in front of the 'window'.

El can't control the tears that fill her eyes as she sees him again, after all this time. Her 'papa'—the man she thought was the only one who could love a freak like her...that is, until she met people who showed her true affection and unconditional love. Mike. Hopper. Joyce. The party.

"Thank you, Dr. Keller," he says, signaling that she should leave.

Eleven swallows hard and stares at the window, unsure what to say.

"Do you know what this is?"

She shakes her head, looking at the cage and then back at the

window.

"Right now it is an ordinary window. A closed window. I need you to open it for me."

She steps back in horror. He wants her to reopen the gate. "No. I'll *never* do that."

"Look at the cage we're standing in. I've built it to contain the creature which possessed your friend last year—Will Beyers. We need to study it, find out how it was able to take over his personality."

"No." She walks back towards the door, trying to get out. "Open the door."

"The illness Eight suffers from is similar to the one which infected Will, in that once the virus takes over the patient's body, it starts erasing their minds as well, until all that is left is a monster."

"Let me out!" She pulls with all her might on the door handle but it doesn't budge, so she starts pushing against it with her mind. The steel is too strong, but she keeps trying.

"If we can open a small window into the other side, we may be able to discover a means to cure this virus before it spreads."

She presses her back against the door, panting from the effort. "It won't work. I can't risk opening the gate. It's too dangerous."

"Then Kali will die."

Eleven shakes her head in denial.

He turns on the small t.v. in the corner of the room, which shows a black and white video recording of a small boy lying in bed, coughing and shaking. "And so will your friend."

El can't believe who she sees... "Dustin?"

.

.

.

COMING SOON - THE SACRIFICE

15. The Sacrifice

Chapter 15: The Sacrifice

"No..." El walks up to the t.v. screen, determined to see that it isn't really him...but the closer she gets, the clearer she sees that it *is* Dustin. "There has to be another way."

Brenner furrows his brow in mock sympathy. "It's their only chance. If they die, you'll only have yourself to blame."

Hearing this makes her nauseous. "What makes you think that the virus came from the Upside Down?"

He raises his eyebrows. "Is that what you call it?"

El looks away, annoyed. She doesn't want to talk to him about this. She doesn't want to talk to him about *anything*.

"It's unlike any kind of bacteria we've seen. Our only conclusion can be that it came from your 'Upside Down.'"

"Even if I could open the gate, how does that *help* them?"

"We need to draw out the creature and take a sample to analyze. Once we understand it's biochemistry, we may be able to reverse engineer a cure. Without it, we can only watch them deteriorate until nothing left of them remains." He turns to watch Dustin in the video struggling to breathe.

El's anger at the situation comes to a breaking point. She bursts the television apart from the inside, causing it to catch on fire.

Brenner steps back in amazement, partially irritated that she would risk harming him, but mostly in awe of her supreme powers. He can't help but to smile like a proud papa.

Men in lab coats rush into the cage with fire extinguishers. For a moment, she steals a gaze at the open door, wanting to run...but how can she? Her friends need her...

"What's to stop the monster from trying to possess someone else?" she asks, contemplating all the ways in which his horrible plan can go wrong.

"All great achievements require a sacrifice."

#

Robin's heart is pounding when they strap her head into a cage on the MRI table. They send her into the machine, and after an hour of weird banging, a technician speaks through her headphones. "We're going to inject you with the contrast dye and take some more pictures. You may feel a cold sensation. That's normal. Just remain still."

"Please, let me out..."

The technician in the room injects her IV with more sedative until she stills and falls asleep.

#

On the drive to the mall, Hopper swerves wildly, careening into ditches and jerking the car back up. His vision is blurred and his eyes burn. It doesn't matter. All that matters is getting to El before that psychopath can hurt her.

"Umm, chief, maybe *I* should take the wheel," Steve says nervously from the backseat.

"Huh? We're almost there," he replies, slamming into a pothole.

Mike has to hold on to the dashboard to keep balanced. "Steve's right. Pull over!"

"We have to keep going!" His face is turning purple and red from the strain.

He swerves into the opposite side of the road, where a truck is speeding at them full throttle.

#

Will is quiet at the dinner table. Joyce wouldn't let him go help El, even though he owed her his life many times over. What can zombie boy do anyway? He stabs his Salisbury steak, digging in.

"Hey, slow down," Jonathan says, watching Will splatter his cranberry sauce on the table as he tears into the meat.

"Can't I do *anything*?" Will pushes his plate so that it clatters into Jonathan's, knocking over his water—the glass shatters on the floor.

"Hey!" Joyce turns off the hot water at the sink. "I know you're upset, but you can't throw tantrums like this!" She starts picking up the shattered glass.

Will bends down quickly, pulling a large shard out of her hands, cutting her palm open.

"Ah!" She stares at him in shock. He doesn't acknowledge that he hurt her. He just keeps picking up the pieces, throwing them onto the table and all over his plate.

"Will! What the hell is wrong with you?" Jonathan shouts, shoving him aside so he can help Joyce wrap her hand in a towel. "Are you okay, mom?"

"I...I'm f-fine." She and Jonathan stare at Will like a stranger as he storms into his room, slamming the door.

Blood stains through the white tea towel.

#

"Dustin, do you copy? Over." Lucas listens for an answer, but when none comes, he tosses the walkie talkie onto the couch and sighs.

"Still no answer?" Max asks, concerned. Not only are El and Mike still missing, but now they can't get ahold of Dustin.

"I'm sure he's fine." Lucas shakes his head. Today was one failure after another.

"Will said he was feeling sick...but he seemed fine at school

yesterday."

"And he should answer when one of us calls. It's Party law—unless he isn't near his walkie..."

"Maybe he's in the bathroom," Max suggests, shrugging. She's far more concerned with El and Mike. They should never have gone off on their own. If she hadn't been such a good distraction this morning, they could have gone after Ms. Smith together.

"I know. I'm just on edge. Something about all this doesn't feel right."

Max fidgets the opal ring on her finger. *When the sky is black and red...*

Outside, thunder booms and the sky unleashes a million violent tears. A storm has come to Hawkins.

#

When Robin wakes from her nightmare, everything is too bright. She wants to block the sun from her eyes, but finds that she can't move her hands. Maybe she slept on them. Looking down, she realizes that she's actually sitting in a chair, and not in bed like she thought. She tries to stand, but finds she can't move her legs either. "Huh?" She blinks rapidly, trying to clear away the cobwebs...which is when she sees the straps tying her wrists to the chair, palms up. Her ankles are similarly strapped down. "No!" She tugs and tugs, but it only results in pain.

Looking up, she realizes that she is in the center of a strange steel cage. In front of her hangs some kind of window, but it doesn't seem to lead anywhere. She hears movement behind her. "Hello?" She tries to look around, but can't see where the noise is coming from.

The lights in the room go dark, and a strange humming sound vibrates all around her.

Dr. Keller steps into view, long enough to check her eyes with a small light.

"What are you doing? What is this?"

Keller pulls out a large switchblade from her front pocket. "Just relax." She cuts a deep gash into Robin's left palm.

"Ah! Stop!" She starts to cry as she watches her blood pouring out and onto the floor, less from the pain and more from sheer panic and terror. "Why are you doing this?" she manages to choke out through sobs.

Keller closes the switchblade and leaves the cage.

Electricity snaps and crackles around the window frame, the only thing illuminating the room. Robin stares at the strange sight through strands of hair. She keeps tugging on the restraints, but it only causes her to bleed out more.

Inside the viewing room, Dr. Keller joins Dr. Brenner and his team.

"It isn't working," Brenner complains, squinting at the window in disappointment.

"We could only attempt to recreate the phenomena, doctor."

Brenner nods grimly. He knew all too well that his staff could not truly grasp the mechanism of Eleven's power. "Bring in the girl."

Eleven is led into the cage, and immediately runs to Robin's aid. She tugs at the restrains and successfully gets them off.

"Thank you," Robin says, shaking, "...but what are you doing here?"

The magnetic field is going haywire, electricity spiking all over the room.

"Eleven, I need you to find the creature," Brenner says over the loudspeakers.

"Go to hell," she replies, sending the electricity straight at Brenner, setting his viewing window ablaze.

The cage is filled with smoke and fire. El pulls Robin up, who is shaking violently from shock.

Their backs are turned when a swirling darkness fills the window behind them, and a dark smoking energy reaches out—

•

•

•

COMING SOON: THE EXORCIST

16. The Exorcist

Chapter 16: The Exorcist

The flames keep rising as arms of smoke wrap themselves around El and Robin's necks, dragging them to the floor, pulling them towards the window to the Upside Down.

El struggles to fight it, choking, holding onto the metal chair which is nailed with thick iron rods into the floor. It fills her throat, her ears, her eyes—every part of her. She can feel it like a million frozen needles coursing through her blood.

It easily pulls Robin by her ankles up and through the hanging window. "No! Please, help me!"

Eleven is still aware enough to hear her scream, so she reaches out, pulling Robin with her mind and dropping her back into the cage a few feet. This brief moment focused elsewhere allows the Shadow an opportunity to tighten its grip inside her. She loses consciousness as it fills her mind.

Robin is left clinging to the window from the other side, only her fingers left hanging on to this reality.

"Turn it off!" Brenner orders, barely able to see anything through the blaze except Eleven having some kind of seizure.

Robin loses her grip on the window and is pulled into the Upside Down.

The machine powers off and men rush into the cage, attempting to put out the fire.

Brenner sidesteps the flames, cautiously walking over the Eleven. Her eyes are rolled back in her head as she continues to seize. He leans over, injecting her with a sedative. Her body begins to relax in his grip. He scoops her off the floor, carrying her limp body out of the cage.

Hopper swerves away from the oncoming traffic at the last moment, but this doesn't keep them from careening into a ditch. The truck honks long and hard at them as it speeds by.

The sky cracks open, lightening piercing through thick clouds. Rain pelts the car again and again. *Late. Late. Late.*

Mike punches the dashboard. "What is *wrong* with you?" he shouts at Hopper, but when he turns to look at him, he sees him coughing up blood into his hands. "Steve...we need help..."

Steve unstraps his seatbelt and he leans forward as Hopper passes out. "Yeah...we really do."

#

A few blocks away, Billy arrives to drive Max home. She says goodbye to Lucas just as the rain begins to fall.

"How was your little date with *Mucus*?" He takes a long pull from his cigarette.

Max slams her back against the car seat, wishing that anyone in the world would pick her up instead. "Shut up, Billy. It was...weird."

He starts the car, turning on the lights and windshield wipers. "Aren't you going to ask me about *my* day?"

She sighs. "How was your day?" *There really is no escaping the mundane, is there?*

"It was very, very interesting. Thank you for asking," he replies in mock pleasantry. "A woman showed up at the house—she was pretty hot, actually. She was looking for you. Said her name's Sabrina."

"What?!"

Billy smiles smugly. He knew this would get a good reaction out of her. "She wanted to give you a message. When she saw you weren't home she gave me a letter to give you."

"What letter?"

He pats his jean jacket, indicating that the letter is in the inside pocket.

"Give it to me!"

"I don't hear the magic words," he taunts, driving passed the sheriff's car, stuck in the ditch.

"Oh my god, pull over!" Max cries, seeing Mike, Steve and Hopper stranded.

"No."

"Pull *over*," she repeats, this time grabbing the wheel and tugging so that they swerve to the side of the road.

"What the hell, Max!" He stomps on the breaks.

She jumps out of the car, rushing over to Mike's window. She bangs on the glass three times, trying to get his attention. She can see Hopper passed out in the driver's seat, blood dripping from his nose.

"What happened?"

Billy slams his car door, walking over to them as Steve gets out of the cruiser. He whistles when he sees him. "Well, if it isn't Stevie Harrington. Looks like you need some help, huh?"

#

Brenner watches as his team works on Eleven. They are all wearing white hazmat suits, unwilling to risk becoming infected by this alien energy themselves. They place the EEG cap on her head and attach her to several monitors. She looks so helpless, lying there on the hospital gurney—nothing like the dynamo she has proven herself to be.

"The Beyers boy deteriorated in a matter of days after the creature entered his mind," Dr. Keller reminds him through the plastic hazmat barrier. "We can't be sure *how* it will affect her."

"Keep her sedated, for now," he concurs. "We'll start the tests once

she's stable."

"Yes, doctor."

He turns to see his lead technician enter the medical bay. "Any sign of the Robin girl?"

"Video indicates that the creature pulled her through the window just before it closed. She's gone, sir."

"Too bad. I had hoped we could use her to study the creature." He turns back to look at Eleven. "At least we have one viable test subject."

Down the hall, he checks on Eight. They've been able to stabilize her condition, but she's reached a plateau. Soon her mind will be lost and they can proceed with the autopsy. He is disappointed to lose such a powerful prospect, but his ability to control her had been minimal for years, even while she was still in the lab. After Eight's escape, he had adjusted his focus to his most promising subject, and it is with her that all of his hopes and dreams remain.

The lights in her room start to flicker as she gasps, opening her eyes. Her iris's have turned completely black. Then, a wind seems to swirl around her bed and the lights go out. In the dark, a kind of white ash hangs in the air. Everything looks suddenly faded and broken. Kali has created the illusion of the Upside Down, though she's never been there.

"My God..." One of the doctors attending to her stops and stares. "What do we do?"

"Leave her. It's only a projection. She'll stop, eventually."

She remains in the swirling darkness as he walks away.

#

Will opens the window in his room, relieved to feel the cool sensation of wind against his skin. Thunder claps and lightning bursts across the night sky, which is when he sees a familiar ruddy haze illuminated by the moon.

Something is triggered in his mind, and suddenly all his thoughts are gone and he knows exactly what he needs to do.

He climbs out of his window, landing easily on the wet grass outside. He walks down the dark street in the rain, goaded on by the blood red moon. The world turns upside down.

#

"Looks like you need my help," Billy gloats, walking over to the group crowded around the defunct cruiser.

"We don't have time for this, Billy," Max complains. "Hopper is seriously sick. You have to take him to the hospital."

"I'll take him. I'm not a *monster*." He widens his eyes, feigning offense. "But first I need Steve to do something for me."

Steve shakes his head minutely, irritated by unsurprised. "Come on, man. Just do the right thing, for once."

"You don't *know* me, bro." There is a deadly look in his eyes. He takes a moment to think over exactly what he wants. "Okay. I'll drive the chief to the hospital. But you have to kiss my boots."

"You're sick," Mike says, drained by this ridiculous interaction.

"If you want my help, you'll do this one little thing for me," he goads, his gaze piercing.

Steve bends down, staring at Billy's dirty old boots in disgust.

"That's it. One little kiss to save the nice officer."

His face contorts into a frown, but he does it. He kisses the tops of his boots.

"Good, dog," Billy says before kicking him in the face.

"Jesus, you are such an asshole!" Mike shouts.

Steve looks up at him from the ground, his nose bloody, soaked from

the rain, and kicks him in the leg, knocking him down.

"I'm gonna kill you," Billy threatens, leaning on his elbows.

Steve jumps on top of him, punching him in the face over and over. Then, when he is satisfied, he pulls the car keys from Billy's pocket.

He manages to punch Steve in the eye before he hears a clicking noise and sees Max pointing Hopper's gun at his head.

"Don't move."

Steve gets up, and he and Mike pull Hopper out of the cruiser and into Billy's car.

"You're gonna pay for this, Maxie," Billy warns.

She doesn't even blink. "Let's go."

As they drive off, Billy pulls Sabrina's letter out of his jacket pocket. Blood and rain leak onto the envelope.

•
•
•

COMING SOON — SPECIES

17. Heart of Darkness

Ahoy! I took a posting break for a couple of days once the final trailer dropped so that we could all digest it, and oh my does it look like an absolutely mad masterpiece. I am so pleased by the technicolor bonkers brilliance. I could go on. I'm sure you share similar sentiments, so without further ado, I will attempt in the next week to complete this alternative version of season 3 so that we can all move forward with the real thing! LOVE you guys! Thank you so much for reading. It means the world.

CHAPTER 17: Heart of Darkness

In the swirling shadow, Robin crawls on the floor of the cage, inching her way back to the window. The lab is different now—dark, deteriorated, desolate...when she looks through the window, no one is waiting on the other side. El is gone, as well as the scientists. She is alone.

"Hello?" she calls out, walking towards the door. It opens, so she quietly walks through the bizarro laboratory halls, hoping that no one stops her. Their experiment must have failed...or else this is what they wanted...

Around the corner, she hears the cry of some kind of animal—but she can't imagine what it could be. Cautiously, she turns in the opposite direction, but then hears the pounding of feet running towards her...

#

Knock knock knock.

"Will?" Joyce tries the handle of the door and finds it locked. "Open this door, young man! We need to talk." No response on the other side. "Will!" This behavior is so unlike him—the way he tore the glass out of her hand, as though he *wanted* to hurt her... She places her ear against the door but hears nothing but the wind rustling papers on his desk..."Jonathan!"

Jonathan steps into the hallway. "He isn't answering?"

"No, and the door is locked." Her brows are furrowed in consternation. She turns back to the door. "Will, you need to open this door now!" When no reply is offered, she shakes her head. "Jonathan, could you?"

He nods, though not pleased with the idea, and kicks the door open.

They both stare into the empty room and the curtains as they billow on either side of the open window.

#

Mike looks nervously out of the car window at the Emergency entrance to the hospital. In the back of the car, Steve has been trying to rouse Hopper, but hasn't been successful, outside of a few grunts and gasps of pain. "We have to leave him."

Steve gets out of the car and starts hauling Hopper out. "Hey! Over here! We need some help!" he calls to some nurses taking a smoke break.

They rush over, feeling his forehead, checking his eyes. Another nurse rushes out of the building with a wheelchair. "How long has he been like this?"

"I don't know. A day or two maybe?"

"One, two three," they pull him up and into the chair. "We'll need to ask you some questions—" she starts to say, but stops as she watches the car drive away.

Max starts speeding towards the mall, but Steve realizes that they aren't thinking this through. *Again*. "The plan was to get the *chief* to do something," he reminds them. "We'll just get caught again if we go back now. Plus we've got Max with us..."

"What is *that* supposed to mean?" she asks, glancing at him from the rear view mirror.

"No offense, but we're talking about a secret government facility that experiments on kids. I'm not about to go in there again with two fourteen year olds."

"Did you have a gun before?"

"Yes. *Two*. Now we have one little pistol. We need to rethink the plan."

"*Fine*," Mike reluctantly agrees.

"Okay." Steve thinks for a moment. "The last time they closed down the lab, it was because Nancy sent an incriminating tape to a bunch of newspapers..."

"And Jonathan," Mike adds.

"Yeah, I mean, whatever. They sent it. So I'm thinking, what if we film someone leaving the lab out of one their secret elevators or something?"

Mike shakes his head. "That isn't good enough. Who knows what that psychopath is doing to El *right now*? We can't wait and hope for the best."

Steve runs his hands through his hair in exasperation. "Okay, okay. Let's keep thinking."

Max bites her bottom lip, remembering what Billy told her before they pulled over. "Oh my god. I'm so *stupid*!" She honks the horn violently with her palm several times.

"What's wrong?"

"Billy. He said he had a letter for me, from Ms. Smith."

"Did he give it to you?" Mike asks, confused. He thought she was being held at the lab...

"No." She shakes her head. "I was about to ask him for it when I saw you guys and then...do you think it could help?"

"Maybe. But how are we going to get it now?"

"We'll have to find him." She spins the wheel, turning the car around.

#

Robin turns around and sees a disgusting monster running at her at full speed. Its face is that of an evil flower filled with countless teeth. She doesn't stick around to make any more pithy observations. Instead, she runs for her life down the countless corridors.

She sees an open door and runs inside, slamming and locking it behind her. She tries blocking the door with a bookcase, but it is nailed into the wall, so she pulls the metal desk over instead, the chair, anything she can use as a barrier between her and the creature.

It only takes a moment before the creature slams its body against the door, creating an indent in the metal that should not be physically possible.

Robin collapses in the corner of the room, tucking her legs against her chest, rocking back and forth. "Please God, please God, please God," she whispers, lips pressed against her knees.

Another horrifying shriek comes from the monster on the other side, and then silence. Robin almost moves to stand, but then the slamming against the door continues, knocking the chair from the desk, until the door itself bursts open.

Robin covers her head with her arms to protect against the coming attack. Instead of feeling the jaws of the creature sinking into her skin, she feels the light touch of a human hand on her wrist.

"It's okay, Robin. It's only me."

Robin looks up to find the woman who got her into this mess crouched in front of her. "*You*... But what about—?" she looks in fear at the open door.

Sabrina places her hands on Robin's shoulders. "The creature is gone, but there will be others. Come, we have to hurry."

#

Sitting on a boulder in the semi-darkness, illuminated by a street lamp, Billy rereads the letter for the third time.

Dear William,

I know that you will not give Max this letter, as I requested. It was only ever intended for your eyes. Knowing that, please read these words cautiously.

Though you may consider me a stranger, this is not the case.

I know who you are. I know what you've done. I also know there will come a day when those you hate the most forgive you. That day is coming soon, but not in the way you expect it to.

First, you must forgive yourself. You may not think you deserve that forgiveness, but you do. We all do. Resist the urge to push love away. You deserve it as much as anyone. In opening your heart, you open the universe.

Maxine needs your help. Keep her away from her destination tonight. If you do not stop her, she will die.

She will not accept your help willingly, but you must make her stay away. I know that you love your sister. She loves you too. Don't let her die, William. I have seen what happens if you do.

-S.W.

#

Robin stares at the woman beside her with a mixture of anger and fear as they enter the elevator leading back into the mall.

"I understand you must be upset with me," Sabrina says quietly, as the elevator rises.

"Upset? You left me to get caught when all I did was try to *help* you. Do you know what they did to me because of you?"

She nods. "I do—and I'm sorry. But...I needed you to *see* exactly what we're up against."

"What? You *knew* I would get caught?"

"Yes."

"Jesus...*why*? Why me? What have I done to you? I don't even *know* you!"

"No, you don't. But you will."

"What does that mean? *Who are you?*"

Sabrina sighs. "I know who you are because...I'm from the future."

"What?"

"I know it's hard to believe. But look around you, Robin. We're in an *alternate dimension*. Once you know what game you're playing, you start to understand the rules."

The elevator dings, and they enter the desolate mall of the Upside Down.

"No more cryptic crap. Be honest with me. What is all this about?"

Sabrina nods. "I needed to warn them, but they needed to hear it from people they know."

"Warn who about what?"

"Steve, Mike, and Max are headed back here to save you and El. If you don't stop them, Steve and Max will die."

"What are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about El. A dark force is inside her, trying its best to control her mind. If you don't stop them, she'll kill them all."

#

Hidden behind a potted tree, Will Beyers watches Robin and Sabrina talking. As he listens, he uses his mind to call upon a horde of demogorgons. They come running from every direction.

.

•

•

COMING SOON: Chapter 18: Newcomb's Paradox

18. Newcomb's Paradox

Chapter 18: Newcomb's Paradox

In the center of the mall cafeteria, Robin and Sabrina are surrounded by dozens of the monstrous creatures. How did they all get here so quickly? It's as though they have some kind of hive mind...A strange blue mist contorts the environment, making them seem dreamlike, faded, hidden nightmares just out of view. They shriek and click, preparing to pounce. A chill rises from the ground.

"Take my hand! Robin? Take my hand!"

Robin's hand links with hers and suddenly she feels a warm sensation race up her arm. It feels like a mixture of pleasure and pain and then the world vanishes in a ring of golden light.

Color returns first—an explosive rainbow of images moving at hyper speed. Sound returns next—laughter, screams, the general chatter of a population at play. Sabrina brought them out of the Upside Down. They stand at the crux of activity as people throw away their Happy Meals and say farewell to their friends.

Robin clings to Sabrina, crying into her shoulder. "What is going on?"

Sabrina rubs her back, immediately noticing all of the creeped out looks Robin is getting because of the filthy hospital gown she's wearing. "We have to go. Just hold on, okay?" She closes her eyes and the ring of light returns, pulling them out of the fray of human interest.

They reappear in the middle of the road. Sabrina collapses onto the gravel, unconscious, blood dripping from her nose.

#

Max finds Billy sitting on a boulder under lamplight, sprinkling bits of torn paper onto the ground. She gets out of the car, slamming the door after her. "Was that my letter?"

"What are you doing back here? Don't you have someplace to be?"

"I need to know what the letter said, Billy. It's important."

"More important than your brother? Your *family*? I know that word doesn't mean anything to you, but it means something to *me*."

"If that's true, then *help* me. El is in danger and I don't what to do."

"I didn't say *you* were part of my family. You took that from us when you decided to threaten me. I've only ever looked out for you, but you...you don't give a shit about our family. So I don't give a shit about you."

"*Looked out* for me? All you do is make my life miserable."

"You won't have to worry about that much longer." Max looks at him in confusion. "You want to know what the letter says? It says you die. It says you all die. Tonight."

"You're lying."

"I'm not." He laughs to himself. "I'm really not. So make your choice, Max. You can apologize to me and come home, or you can go play hero with your friends and die."

"Go to hell, Billy."

He outstretches his hand to the car. "After you."

#

Dr. Owens leans over Eleven as she sleeps. Under his perfectly white lab coat he wears a well tailored black suit—nothing he would have worn while playing the friendly neighborhood physician. "All that time playing possum, waiting for you to show yourself. We almost stopped believing you were still alive."

Brenner steps into the room. "And she was with Jim Hopper, of all people. The trick was to convince her that I was gone. That she was safe. That was the only way they'd risk exposure. And now that we have her back, we need to make sure those families never interfere with our affairs again."

Owens nods, adding, "Joyce Beyers is planning on moving to California with her sons."

"We'll put a stop to that. As for the Wheelers, finalize their arrangements. I want them on a plane—tonight."

He leans over Eleven, watching her eyes move behind their lids. She's fighting to regain consciousness. He presses the switch on her IV, increasing the dosage. Soon he would wake her, but not before they were sure she could be controlled.

#

Eleven sits with her head buried in her knees. She knows she's dreaming, but it looks so much like the Void. A black emptiness, a black hole. She can hear their voices like distant echoes.

"I want them on a plane—tonight."

"No!" she stands screaming, bursting into tears again. "Don't you dare take him away from me..." But he's already gone. That's the deal she struck. She promised to stay and help Kali and Dustin—before the Mind Flayer returned for her. Now she's just...lost.

"What's wrong, El?" a gentle voice asks, and Will Beyers steps out of the darkness before her.

"How did you...?"

"Get here? I don't know. I kind of just...reached out and found you." He smiles, pleased with himself.

"You can do that?"

"I guess I can now." He holds out his hand to her, and she takes it. He lifts her up so that they are face to face. "You need to wake up, El. He's waiting for you."

"Papa?"

"He's waiting for you to wake up, El. You need to wake up." He grabs her shoulders and starts shaking her violently. "WAKE UP! WAKE UP! WAKE

UP!"

El's eyes blink open.

#

Robin shakes Sabrina, who is lying unconscious in the center of the road. "Wake up!" she shouts at her, terrified she'll have to resort to dragging her off the road.

A car comes speeding at them, but skids into a stop. Steve jumps out from behind the wheel. "Holy shit! Robin?" He runs over to her, pulling her into a hug. They look down at Sabrina. "Jesus, what happened?"

"I think...we teleported? From hell? I don't know..." she sees Max and Mike walking over and feels embarrassed.

"It's okay, we understand." Mike says. "Did you see my friend in there? El?"

"Yes. She tried to save me, but the shadow got her."

"The shadow?" Mike's face has gone completely pale.

Max had just been crying in the car over what Billy said and now this... "Are you sure? El is really strong," she says, trying to find a loophole in this catastrophe.

"He has her now," Sabrina whispers, her eyes cracking open.

"Come on, let's get her into the backseat," Steve tells them. He and Robin carry her over.

Everyone huddles into the car. Steve pulls off the road, behind a large oak tree with low branches.

"I can't...I'm not supposed to directly affect...but it seems I have...this is my fault."

"Please, full sentences. This is a very confusing situation," Steve reminds her.

"Tell them what you told me," Robin suggests.

"I was trying to prevent what happens, but it's all happening anyway." She shakes her head in disappointment. "I was trying to prevent your death."

"What?" Mike bursts out.

"Not you, Mike. But Max and Steve...if you follow Mike into the lab tonight, you enter a future in which you both die."

"And how exactly do you know something like that?" Max asks, crossing her arms in disbelief.

"Because I'm from that future."

"What?"

"What happens tonight will alter the course of history. The shadow has El, and it's first order of business is stripping her of her humanity. He wants her to kill as many people as possible, as quickly as possible. The two of you get caught in the crossfire. It destroys her, haunts her for the rest of her life."

"This is insane. How are you from the *future*?"

"Because...I'm her daughter."

#

El looks down, seeing that she's lying in a hospital bed. She's covered in wires, surrounded by monitors...she looks up to see Papa striding over to her side.

"Eleven." His eyes flash to her IV line, which is still intact. She shouldn't be awake. "How are you feeling?"

She tries to pull away, but finds her wrists and ankles strapped down. "Ah," she tugs against them, "let me go."

"Shh, shh. Calm down." He places his hand on her arm, steadying her. "Do you remember what happened to you in the cage?" She nods.

"Good. We've managed to stabilize you, but there's no way of knowing how the creature will affect you. That's why we need to monitor you. Understand?"

She nods again, choking down tears. "What happened to Robin?"

He breaks eye contact with her, and starts examining her EEG. "She fell into the rabbit hole." He notices several interesting spikes in brain activity...fascinating...

"What?"

He sits on the bed with her. "The creature took her into the other world with it. Do you think you could find her?"

"Find her?" She feels a wave of cold through her bones. Suddenly a point in the back of her head is pounding. "Ahh," she cries out, reeling from the nausea brought on by the sudden onset of pain.

"Eleven?" He flashes a light in her eyes and sees the veins turn black...He turns to the men on the other side of the observation window. "*Do it now.*"

The white room turns a bright red. Heat radiates from the walls. This is just one of the failsafes he planned to keep the creature contained in a host. He had hoped the host wasn't Eleven, but he had been wise enough to prepare for the worst. He leans back over her, stroking her cheek.

Eleven looks away from him, focusing her gaze on the men operating the heat in the viewing room. She squeezes their insides till they pop, blood pouring from their eyes as they collapse on the tiled floor.

All the lights in the room go out, so that Brenner and Eleven are cast in bloody shadow. He can hear the metal sizzle as it melts.

"Eleven? Listen to me. The creature is inside your mind. It's controlling you. But you can fight it, hmm?"

She stands up from the bed, the restraints falling off her in ashes.

"Eleven can't come to the phone right now. But you can call back

later. Try again next time." She advances on him, her eyes now entirely black.

"What *are* you?"

"I'm what happens when you stay in the dark too long."

.

.

.

Lights Out.

.

.

.

PLEH DNES . . .

19. Welcome to the Kingdom

Hey, guys. The countdown has ended and we have a matter of hours left before we get to experience Stranger Things Season 3! I couldn't be happier with how this fic has evolved and landed into an alternate dimension. Love to my readers and reviewers! I'm also happy to bring this story to its conclusion in the next chapter, as we move forward to fully enjoy the magic world the Duffers, cast and crew have created! There is a ton of awesome new interviews online now, so I definitely suggest checking those out. They just dropped a new trailer that highlights Erica as well—there's so much, I'm just so happy...Oh God. Okay, I'll stop gushing. Enjoy.

Chapter 19: Welcome to the Kingdom

She steps into the room of black and white. Here things are upside down, things are burnt blue.

Kali lies on a bed of dirt, dying. El walks up to her. "Nice corpse."

"Please, kill me," Kali begs in her unreality.

"I'll do something better." She leans down beside her, letting a shadow of darkness emit from her eyes. It enters Kali's eyes, her ears too. "Now you'll never die." She holds her hand out and picks her up.

Now her eyes are glowing black. She stares at her hands. "Oh god...I can feel everything...and *hear* everything too."

"Come, sister."

Brenner stands amazed in the doorway. "What are you planning to do?"

"I'm here to free you from your mortal coil and show you the path to paradise. Isn't that what you wanted? Playing around, looking for God. Well you found her."

#

Kali walks passed them, against the wall, to save the boy across the

hall. She had heard his screams. They matched her own.

He sits in bed, terrified and pale. His curls are soaked in sweat.
"What's going on out there?"

She grabs his wrist. "Dustin?" reading his name on the bracelet.
"Would you like to join the Dark Side?"

"In a life or death situation where I'm powerless without it?"

"Yes."

"No?"

"Then, here, look at this tiny dragon." She makes him see a real dragon perched on the edge of the bed while the shadow creeps into his eyes and takes over him too.

"I love dragons. Let's go spread some evil." He jumps out of bed, following her.

#

"Why spare me?" Brenner asks Eleven, following her up the stairs.

They keeping going up, up, up.

"Prove your loyalty. Bring me her friends. I have more important things to do." She opens the door to the roof, slamming and locking it behind her.

#

Everyone is still huddled in the car, reeling from the 'Sabrina is Eleven's daughter from the Future' news.

"Does that mean I'm your dad? Or...are we gonna break up one day?" Mike asks, eyes as wide as saucers.

Sabrina shakes her head. "You've got to work that out on your own."

"If I can get close enough, maybe I can help her remember who she is," he suggests.

Sirens blare in the distance. "That isn't for us, is it?" Max asks nervously.

Steve starts the engine. "Shit." Soon the flashing lights grow closer and closer, larger and larger.

He drives back onto the road, but too late. The lights are flashing on both ends of the highway.

They're surrounded.

#

In the Security Office, Brenner watches El on the roof through his cameras.

She is holding her hands in the air—it appears she is changing the composition of the sky. Shifting the weather. Pulling lightening from the clouds.

He hadn't found God. He made her.

#

Officers flash their lights in through the windows of the car. "Open up!"

"You can't let them take you," Sabrina warns Max.

Steve glances over at her, scared. Could she be telling the truth? Was his death written in the stars tonight?

"We need ya'll to step out of the vehicle."

"Why?" Steve shouts through the window.

"You're in possession of a stolen vehicle, young man."

"It's my brother's car. He let me borrow it," Max says, and all of the lights flash in her face.

"Young lady, we need you to step out of the vehicle as well."

Their flashlights shift onto Sabrina and Robin's faces, and then on Robin's hospital gown.

Steve forgets his better judgement and presses on the gas, instantly crashing into the front of a police cruiser, but making it through the line. "Holy shit!"

As he is speeding away, they all look up to see the storm gathering directly over the Starcourt Mall. Darkness leaks out of swirling wind, blotting out the stars.

"We're not in Hawkins anymore..."

-
-
-

COMING SOON — The final chapter: PARADISE LOST